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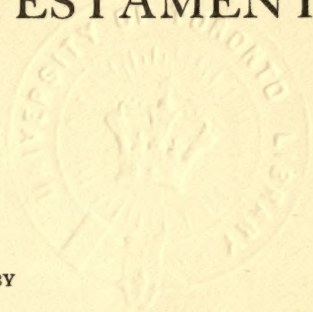
Descriptive Prospectus on Application.

THE APOLOGETIC OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY

E. F. SCOTT, M.A. (GLAS.), B.A. (OXON.)

AUTHOR OF "THE FOURTH GOSPEL: ITS PURPOSE AND THEOLOGY"



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PREFACE

It has long been recognised that the apologetic interest played a significant part in the making of the New Testament. The writers of the various books were at the same time missionaries, in daily conflict with the prevailing opposition; and their account of the Christian beliefs has almost always a defensive as well as a more positive bearing. In modern critical literature there are frequent incidental references to this apologetic aspect of the New Testament; but I am not aware of any separate discussion of the primitive Apology as a whole. I believe that the subject is important, not only for the right understanding of the New Testament and of the origin of doctrine, but for practical guidance in the work of Christian defence.

The lectures which are reproduced, with some considerable additions, in the present book, were delivered in February of this year at Glasgow University, in accordance with the terms of the Alexander Robertson Trust. I take this opportunity of thanking Professors Reid, Cooper, Robertson and Stewart, of the Theological Faculty in the University, for the great kindness which I received at their hands.

I am indebted for valuable assistance in the revision of the proofs to my brother, Rev. Ebenezer Scott, B.D., of Liverpool.

E. F. SCOTT.

PRESTWICK, *September* 1907.

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THE APOLOGETIC OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

LECTURE I

THE APOLOGETIC ELEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is customary to distinguish one particular period of early church history as the Age of the Apologists; and this division is a convenient and, to some extent, a just one. By the end of the first century the great creative impulse which was the immediate outcome of our Lord's personal ministry had well-nigh spent itself. The cardinal doctrines of Christianity had been laid down in the New Testament writings, and the task devolving on the church was to defend its faith as it had once for all

been delivered to the saints. It is characteristic of the literature of this period that it is cast deliberately in the apologetic mould. The church is consciously on trial before the world of Greco-Roman culture, and sets itself to render an account of its worship and beliefs, and to plead for their wider acceptance. But while this secondary period is in a special sense the Age of the Apologists, we must be careful not to isolate it. From the beginning our religion had been called on to defend itself against misunderstandings and bitter opposition. Our Lord Himself is aware that His legacy to His followers will not be peace but a sword; and the strife which He anticipated began with the very moment of His death. His disciples were thrown from the first into conflict with their own countrymen. The Gentile mission involved them in a further conflict with the Pagan world, to which their message proved strange and unintelligible. At every step of its progress Christianity was exposed to some fresh antagonism, and

could only maintain itself by an unceasing struggle.

Our New Testament came into being in the process of this struggle, which is everywhere reflected in it. Paul and his fellow-apostles are always conscious that they stand for a religion which is spoken against ; and one chief purpose of their writing is to vindicate the gospel in view of the attacks. It may be accepted as one of the most certain results of modern criticism that the New Testament is permeated with an apologetic interest, which is often strongest where it is least apparent. The design of these lectures is to examine the New Testament Apologetic. What is its nature ? What value can be attributed to it ? How far can we still derive guidance, in our controversies to-day, from a study of this earliest and most authoritative defence of the Christian religion ?

The subject is one of far-reaching importance, and that in several directions. In the first

place, we cannot understand the New Testament itself without some appreciation of the controversial motives which were present in the minds of the writers. They were not secluded thinkers but men of action, who never wrote without a practical object. They addressed themselves to the immediate needs of the early church, and their acquaintance with these needs determined the form and, in large measure, the substance of their message. In the case of each of the writings we have to take account of some polemical purpose which was almost certainly in the background; and when this is understood the argument of the book begins to explain itself. Even the Gospels, which might seem at first sight to be purely historical documents, become more intelligible when we bear in mind that they were largely composed in a special apologetic interest. It was necessary for the church not merely to have some record of the life of Jesus, but to have proofs, which might be urged against Jewish and Pagan unbelievers, of His

Messianic claims. Out of the mass of reminiscence handed down from Apostolic times, the Evangelists selected those incidents which bore more directly on the question of the Messiahship. Their narrative is abrupt and fragmentary, because it was not intended to be a history in the strict sense, but only a collection of evidences on one point of paramount importance. In like manner the apologetic motive may be traced with more or less clearness in each of the books, and is in some cases the master-key to its whole teaching.

Again, it was the effort to defend the Christian position against contemporary forms of unbelief that gave the chief impulse to the development of doctrine. The great Christian doctrines were indeed implicit from the first in the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah ; but no need was felt to define them or co-ordinate them into a system. The need arose as the new religion found itself subjected, on one side and another, to fierce criticism. In order that opponents might be answered and the faith of

the church built on a sure foundation, it was necessary to reflect more deeply on the primitive beliefs. The apparent contradictions which they presented had to be reconciled. Their inner truth and meaning required to be separated from the accidental forms in which they were largely entangled. They needed to be expressed in new terms and under new categories of thought, so as to enforce conviction on the Gentile as well as on the Jewish mind. We fail to understand the New Testament theology unless we remember that it came into existence in an age of conflict and by way of answer to an apologetic demand. This explains why particular doctrines were thrown into the forefront, to the exclusion of others which to our minds seem hardly less important. It explains also why these doctrines were in some instances developed one-sidedly, with the result that their true significance became partly obscured. The New Testament writers did not aim at formulating a theology which should exhaust once for all the whole content of the gospel

of Christ. Their immediate concern was to defend their faith at the points where it was chiefly imperilled, by the definite antagonisms of the first century.

Once more, the study of the New Testament Apologetic is important from a practical as much as from a historical point of view. It is true that the original attack on Christianity was in many respects widely different from that with which we have to reckon to-day, and new methods of defence have become necessary. But the difference is by no means so great as might appear on the surface. The Christian religion, throughout its whole history, has found itself opposed by certain constant types of unbelief, which have assumed a fresh disguise according to the character of each new age. Celsus, towards the end of the second century, anticipates almost all the objections which still reappear in the most modern criticisms of Christianity. He himself only gathered into a formal treatise the arguments which had long been current in the synagogue

and the market-place. And the specific arguments were rooted, as they are still, in instincts and modes of thought which remain permanent under all the various phases of religious speculation. The writers of the New Testament were already face to face with this radical opposition to Christianity. Their defence, when we look to the broad ideas underlying it, and not to its mere accidental forms, is still valid, and must ever serve as the basis of all true Apologetic.

The New Testament Apology differs in one respect from the formal Apologies of the later period. It is addressed to an audience already in sympathy with Christianity—not to an outside world which held aloof or was professedly hostile. The apologetic drift of the various books is on this account partially hidden, but is no less real because it lies beneath the surface. The Christian communities for which the Apostles wrote were placed in an alien environment, and were in constant

danger of falling back into the lower forms of religion. They were inclined to carry over into their Christianity ideas and superstitions which belonged to their past. They were acquainted with the current objections to their faith and were troubled by them, and demanded some answer which would satisfy their own doubts and help them in controversy with the unbeliever. The Apologetic is the more instructive, because it is addressed, in the first instance, to Christians. We are reminded that the original readers of the New Testament were not yet completely grounded in their faith. The Apostles in writing to them are always conscious that they stand with one foot in the past and must have the new beliefs stated to them defensively. There can be little doubt, for that part, that much of the argument incorporated in the New Testament was first employed for directly apologetic purposes. In the Fourth Gospel we meet with whole chapters which reflect the current discussions between church and synagogue. The

Epistles of Paul contain passages which read like transcripts of controversial speeches delivered to Jews and heathen, and we may fairly assume that this was indeed their original character. Paul, as we know, "disputed daily" (Acts xvii. 17) with those who called his faith in question; and the arguments which he advanced on those occasions may well have found their way into his Epistles, with little change either of substance or form.

The New Testament may be regarded, then, as in one aspect, and that not the least important, an Apology, Addressed in the first instance to Christian converts, it so presents the message of Christ as to furnish a reply to the criticisms of the unbelieving world. We have now to consider more particularly the character of this New Testament Apology. It was determined, naturally, by the character of the attack; and the church, in the course of its expansion during the first century, encountered opposition on three different sides.

We have therefore three lines of defence, to which a fourth may be added, and these will be examined in detail in the ensuing lectures. It will be enough at the present stage to indicate them briefly.

1. Christianity arose on Jewish soil and found its earliest and most uncompromising opponents among the Jewish teachers. The hostility which had pursued Jesus in His life-time was directed after His death against His church, and became always more radical as the church attained to a fuller consciousness of its true mission. At the outset the controversy centred on the question of the Messiahship of Jesus ; but this single point of difference covered a profound antagonism which was certain, sooner or later, to declare itself. Already in the early chapters of the book of Acts we can discern the gradual widening of the cleavage between Christianity and Judaism, and after the appearance of Paul it became complete. Paul was sensible from the first that the gospel was at variance, in its whole

essence and motive, with the religion of the Law. The acceptance of the crucified Jesus as the Messiah involved a new beginning—a revised conception of the entire relation between God and men. In Paul's Epistles, accordingly, we find Christianity opposed to Judaism as a separate religion. The defence of the Messianic claim of Jesus widens out into a defence of the Christian view of morality and history and man's destiny and the nature of the religious life. We can hardly overestimate the importance, for the whole future of Christianity, of this early conflict with a spiritual religion, so nearly akin to itself. It was thereby compelled to realise its own distinctive nature. It developed, henceforth, not as a higher type of Judaism, but in accordance with the new conception implicit in the teaching of Christ.

2. The mission to the Gentiles involved the church in a conflict with Paganism. This conflict, it is true, does not bulk so largely in the New Testament as in the Apologies of the

next century. There is no detailed criticism of the Pagan myths, no elaborate comparison of the worship and beliefs of heathenism with those of Christianity. The religions of the ancient world are classed together as so many species of idolatry, and the nobler elements which were present in them are scarcely recognised. But the New Testament polemic is all the more valuable because of this very indefiniteness. Paul knows little of the special accidental features which belonged at a given time to classical Paganism, and looks solely at heathen religion, in its broad and permanent characteristics. The profound analysis contained in the first chapter of Romans is equally applicable to all types of heathenism. It deals not merely with a bygone mode of heathen worship, but with the essential heathen spirit, which manifests itself under forms of culture as well as in crude idolatries. Much of it has a practical bearing on tendencies which we have still to combat in our civilisation to-day. We must re-

member, too, that the New Testament is concerned with Paganism not only as a religion but as a social and political system. Ancient society was based throughout on heathen ideas, which thus retained their power when the creeds themselves were abandoned. The attitude of Christianity to the established order was determined mainly by this fact, that it was an order resting on heathenism.

3. It was with the popular religion that the Christian mission first came into conflict, but as it grew in influence it encountered a more dangerous form of opposition. For a long time past the Pagan beliefs had ceased to be taken seriously by thoughtful men, and had been displaced by various creeds derived from philosophical speculation. These in themselves were abstract and unsatisfying, but had been partly vitalised by union with the theosophies of the East. An attempt was made on the part of this philosophical religion to effect an alliance with Christianity. It is

true that the movement which we know by the general name of Gnosticism did not reach its head until the latter part of the second century, but already in the New Testament we can trace its beginnings. A section of the church was dissatisfied with the apparent simplicity of the gospel, and sought to advance to something higher by adopting the current speculations. The later books of the New Testament are all occupied, more or less, with this movement, which was the more dangerous as it threatened the church from within. It was necessary to protest against the mingling of Christian doctrine with foreign elements, and to reaffirm the central truths on which the religion was founded. It was necessary to sum up the beliefs of the church in an authoritative rule of faith, which might "try the spirits, whether they be of God" (1 Jn. iv. 1).

4. We may distinguish yet a further aspect in the defence of Christianity as set before us in the New Testament. As the church

widened its borders and came to realise more clearly the nature of its message, it learned to conceive of the religion of Christ as the final and absolute religion. There ceased to be a question of the truth of Christianity as contrasted with Judaism or any other accepted creed. The conviction enforced itself that God had spoken once and for ever by Jesus Christ. No higher revelation was possible. This conviction is implicit in the entire teaching of the New Testament, but in two of the latest books—the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Fourth Gospel—it attains to definite expression. These two writings, and especially the Gospel, may therefore be held to represent the final outcome of the New Testament considered as an Apologetic.

It will be convenient to grasp our subject under these four heads, which correspond, broadly speaking, to the actual stages of the development of the church in the first century. These divisions are not, however, to be regarded as mutually exclusive. The period in

which Christianity was opposed by Judaism alone is not represented in the New Testament, except by the narrative in Acts, which was compiled at a much later time. In Paul's Epistles—our earliest documents—we have the double controversy with Judaism and heathenism, and at the same time clear anticipations of the later struggle with the incipient Gnostic movement. From the beginning, likewise, we meet with the conception of the absolute nature of Christianity, although it is not yet deliberately formulated. Thus the several lines of defence are not held separate, but continually overlap, and serve to strengthen and complete one another.

We turn now to the method of proof by which the New Testament writers sought to establish the truth of their religion. The ground of the defence shifted, as might have been expected, according to the nature of the attack. Paul can say "to the Jews I became as a Jew,—to them that are without law as

without law"; and in his letters we have ample evidence of the variety and resourcefulness of his appeal. Nevertheless we can distinguish several main lines of argument, on which the New Testament Apology, in its several directions, may be said to rest.

1. The proof which is employed most frequently is that from scripture. As against the Jews, who accepted the Old Testament as the ultimate authority, this evidence was incontestable, but it was scarcely less impressive to the outside world. By the ancient mind generally a doctrine was recognised as true in proportion to its antiquity. It was assumed that in some former age men had been admitted to closer neighbourhood with the higher world, and had access to sources of knowledge which had since been closed. "You Greeks," said the Egyptian priest to Herodotus, "are only children"; and the Greeks acknowledged their inferiority. They deferred to the ancient oracles of Egyptian and Oriental wisdom. Their greatest thinkers

sought to connect their profounder speculations with some myth or tradition that had come down from the immemorial past. It was the chief boast of the Jews, when they were thrown into intellectual converse with the Hellenic world, that their sacred books were anterior to all others, and contained the primitive revelation. Their success in proselytising was due, probably, as much to the presumed antiquity of their religion as to its intrinsic power. Christianity, on the other hand, was despised for nothing so much as because it was a palpable innovation, and to deliver it from this reproach was one of the first interests of its early missionaries. It is an ever-recurring thought in the New Testament that the gospel, though proclaimed so recently, had existed in some manner from the beginning, and was actually more ancient than the Law. And by the appeal to scripture the missionaries sought to establish this antiquity which they boldly claimed for their religion. They fell back on those oldest of

records as proving that the advent of Christ had been foreseen and prefigured, and all His work planned out by God from the foundation of the world. The Old Testament, rightly understood, was not a Jewish but a Christian book.

Starting, therefore, from the principle that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. xix. 10), the Apostles claim to understand for the first time what God had spoken through His ancient messengers. In the light of the fulfilment it was now possible to trace out the import of the dim hieroglyphics. Frequently, no doubt, the desired meaning is wrested out of Scripture by methods of interpretation which, to our modern sense, appear inadmissible. An arbitrary allegorical value is placed on various texts, although their real significance is sufficiently clear. But it is easy to make too much of the liberty which the New Testament writers allow themselves in the use of the allegorical method. When we consider that

in the Jewish schools — Alexandrian and Rabbinical alike — this was the one accepted method of interpreting scripture, we are impressed not so much with the caprice as with the prevailing soundness of the New Testament exegesis. Instances there certainly are of pure allegory, as in Paul's famous reference to Hagar and Sarah, but as often as not the true meaning of scripture is discerned with a genuine religious insight. The conception of the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of Christ was, in the deeper sense, a just one; and the writers of the early church, by their seemingly arbitrary exegesis, are often piercing beneath the mere letter to the ultimate spiritual intention.

Thus Paul, in his application to the Christian community of texts relating immediately to Israel, only carries out to its legitimate issue the prophetic idea that the "remnant," the religious kernel of the nation, was the true object of God's choice and favour. The thesis on which he bases his theology, that

the promise came before the Law, is, on the face of it, a Rabbinical subtlety ; yet it gives expression to the undoubted fact that the heart of the Old Testament teaching is not to be sought in the Law, but in the ethical revelation of God. In like manner, when he insists that Abraham was justified by faith, because the mention of his belief in God precedes the account of the circumcision of Isaac, we have something more than a forced exegesis. The Apostle has rightly grasped the truth implied in the story of Abraham, that God accepts a man for his inward spirit of faith and obedience, not for his performance of outward rites.

The New Testament use of scripture cannot therefore be discounted as purely arbitrary. It might more fairly be argued that by a very different road the Apostles had arrived at an estimate of the Old Testament similar to that which we are now beginning to reach as a result of modern criticism. They saw in the dealings of God with Israel, not, indeed, a

progressive revelation, but a foreshadowing, and so interpreted the type by the reality. It is this very disregard of the mere letter which gives permanent apologetic value to the New Testament proof from scripture. We have long since abandoned the theory of a literal inspiration, and cannot accept a doctrine as true because it can be supported by some chance verse of prophecy. If Paul had derived his proofs from the bare letter of scripture, the proofs would have fallen with the divine authority of the several passages. But his argument is founded on the inward meaning of scripture, regarded as an organic whole and understood by a religious intuition. Scripture is made subordinate to the living Spirit of God. It is employed not in proof but in illustration of certain beliefs which had really been derived from a higher source.

2. This first line of evidence is closely connected with another. The Old Testament, as we have seen, was authoritative, not only as the immediate word of God but as the ancient,

time-consecrated revelation. But there was a revelation prior to any that was contained in books. By virtue of his inborn rational nature, man was allied to God, and had the divine law written in his heart. The New Testament appeals continually to this principle of reason in man as one of the chief witnesses to the truth of Christianity. The message is true because it is in conformity with reason—it answers to the inward unchangeable character of human nature. In the teaching of our Lord Himself we meet with such a saying as “Why of your own selves judge ye not what is right?” and the same thought is repeated, under many variations, by Paul. Christianity as opposed to the outward, meaningless ritual of Jews and heathen is the *reasonable* service. It reveals to men the unknown God whom their own deeper instincts lead them to worship ignorantly. The mission to the Gentiles naturally caused an increased emphasis to be laid on this line of proof, which to the philosophical Greek mind was more cogent than any other. A

powerful impetus was given to it by the adoption of the Logos doctrine, with its double implication that Christ was the divine Word and also the divine Reason. The light which lighteth every man had originally come forth from Him, and responded to Him as the ultimate truth. We cannot conceal from ourselves that the one-sided emphasis on the *reason* implicit in Christianity was fraught with a serious peril. Even in New Testament times we find a growing tendency to construe the gospel message in purely intellectual terms; and the tendency became far more pronounced in the succeeding age. If Christianity was compelled to struggle for its very existence with the great Gnostic movement of the second century, the danger was largely brought about by the Christian teachers themselves, in their over-anxiety to claim for their religion the prestige of a higher philosophy.

3. The New Testament, however, makes its central appeal neither to scripture nor to the natural instincts of reason. It maintains

that the gospel verifies itself through personal experience, by the witness of the Spirit of God borne in upon our spirit. After his elaborate theological deductions Paul invariably comes back to a simple "I know." The evidence on which he rests has been given him in a spiritual intuition, which cannot be analysed or established by any mere logical process. A proof of this nature was useless for polemical argument, yet the Apostles are well aware that the truth of their teaching cannot be rightly apprehended by any other means. "We speak wisdom among them that are initiated; for God hath revealed these things unto us by His Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 6, 10). It was necessary to belong to Christ, to have a mind in full inward sympathy with Him, before you could have satisfying evidence of His claim and His message. "Wilt thou manifest thyself to us and not unto the world?" asks the disciple in the Fourth Gospel (xiv. 22). His question echoes the objection which was urged against the Christians from the first, and which is

stated at length in the attack of Celsus. They refused to offer intelligible reasons for their belief in Christ, and fell back on the inward conviction of faith. But it is implied in the answer to the disciple's question that this must needs be so. Christ could reveal Himself only to His own.

4. None the less the witness of the Spirit could, in a manner, be externalised, and so impress the truth even on the unbelieving world. While it was bound up with personal experience and was so far incommunicable, it declared itself in the lives of the disciples. John himself, in the sequel to the passage just quoted, contemplates this indirect action of the Spirit, convincing the world of sin and righteousness and judgment; and the same thought is insisted on ever and again in the course of the New Testament Apologetic. The purer moral life to which the Christians are continually exhorted is meant to have an evidential value. The world was incapable of receiving the Spirit, but could recognise

its fruits in the higher activities of Christian believers and of the church as a whole. "Ye are my epistle," says Paul, "known and read of all men."

These, then, are the chief lines of defence adopted by the New Testament writers ; and we shall consider more fully in the ensuing lectures the varying emphasis and significance which are attached to the several arguments. Meanwhile it is necessary to indicate, however briefly, the cardinal points at issue in the primitive Apologetic. They may be summarised under four main heads.

1. From the outset the controversy centred in the question of the Person of Christ. His claim to be the Messiah had been rejected, and the disciples were called on to maintain it, in face of an unbelief which had been enormously strengthened by the fact of the Crucifixion. We shall see that the claim of Jesus was not only upheld, but that the very difficulties which seemed fatal to it served to suggest

a yet higher view of His Person and work. His title of Messiah merged in the loftier one of the Son of God, the Word made flesh. Before the close of the first century the chief anxiety of the church was no longer to assert the dignity of Jesus, but to affirm the essential humanity of the divine life.

2. It was discovered that the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah involved a new conception of God and His relation to the world. Our Lord had proclaimed His message in the language of the time, under the traditional forms of Jewish thought; yet in the inward spirit of His teaching He had broken entirely with the past. He had dissolved the ancient idea of religion and replaced it by a new one. The disciples came gradually to understand the message and to perceive its real scope and purpose, in the course of deeper reflection on the Person. They found that the recognition of the claim of Jesus necessitated a profound change in all their religious conceptions. Worship, morality, the very idea of God

and of man's relation to Him, had all to be reconstructed. Thus in its whole character as a new revelation, Christianity was brought into conflict with previous beliefs, and was compelled to assert its validity over against them.

3. A further subject of controversy was the right of the Christian church itself. In the earliest period the disciples asked no more than an acknowledgment of their community as a legitimate branch of the stem of Judaism; and it was the resolute hostility of the Jewish religious leaders which obliged them to make a higher claim. From the time of Paul onward, the church took up the position that it was the true Israel—heir to the promises and the ancient prerogatives. The Jewish nation was the schismatic body, which in its rejection of the Messiah had itself been rejected. But the church's right to exist had to be vindicated, not only against Jewish prejudice, but against the growing antagonism of the Pagan world. In a society

which was grounded in heathenism, the Christians had no other choice than to keep themselves, as far as possible, separate; and this seeming misanthropy, combined with the novel character of their worship, drew down upon them the slanders and suspicions of their Pagan neighbours. We have frequent allusion in the New Testament to these misconceptions, which were rendered still more dangerous when the charge of political disloyalty was added to them. The empire had not yet taken up arms against the church, but the feeling was present from a very early time that a rupture was inevitable. Jesus Himself had been put to death by the Roman pro-consul as a revolutionary. The church, while outwardly loyal, stood for another king than Cæsar, and was certain to find itself, sooner or later, in opposition to the ruling power. Throughout the New Testament we can trace a constant anxiety to shield the church from the menace which hung over it. Proofs are multiplied that it is not a

political but a purely spiritual organisation, and that the Roman authorities have hitherto viewed it with favour. Its members are warned to avoid every kind of action which might bear the colour of revolt against the constituted order.

4. Apart from these larger issues, the church was required to offer some answer to the criticisms which were called forth by particular tenets of its faith. The great chapter on the Resurrection in First Corinthians is written in defence of a Christian doctrine that was stranger and more incredible than any other to the heathen mind. The belief in the Parousia is likewise the theme of a definite Apologetic — especially in the later books, which date from a time when the promise had apparently failed. In the Fourth Gospel we can distinguish many passages which contain the church's reply to criticisms of a specific nature. The most elaborate of these passages is the defence of the doctrine of the Eucharist in the sixth chapter. On

the whole, however, we are struck with the comparative absence of arguments dealing with particular aspects of Christian belief. The new religion sought to be judged in its larger character by its two or three central issues; and the details of its theology, which chiefly occupied the later polemic, fell out of sight. It is this concentration on the few sovereign truths that gives a permanent interest and value to the New Testament Apology.

A few words are necessary, in closing, with regard to the bearing of the various writings on our discussion. In all of them the apologetic motive is more or less present, though in some it is more prominent than in others, while in each it assumes a different character and direction.

The Synoptic Gospels, as has been already suggested, were largely apologetic in their origin. The Messiahship of Jesus was the chief article in the Christian faith, and could

only be defended by an actual survey of the Saviour's life, in its relation to Messianic ideals and prophecies. But apart from the question of the Messiahship, the three gospels are full of references which need to be explained in the light of first century polemic. They are documents, we must always remember, not only for the life of Jesus, but for the history of the primitive church to which we owe them.

The book of Acts, dealing expressly, as it does, with the formation and development of the church, bears the apologetic impress in a more marked degree. Especial prominence is given in this book to the defence of Christianity against political charges; but the various objections to its religious teaching are also combated. A peculiar value attaches to the numerous speeches which are recorded, in their substance, if not in their literal form, by the writer of Acts. They are the chief exception to the general rule that the New Testament addresses itself, in the first instance,

to the Christian community. We learn from these speeches the nature of the defence which the missionaries were wont to offer when they were confronted directly with Jewish and heathen opposition.

The Epistles of Paul are our richest source for the study of the primitive Apologetic. Their positive statement of Christian doctrine is in almost every case presented defensively, in view of some opposing tendency, within or without the church. In the course of his many-sided activity Paul encountered the prevailing unbelief in all its phases, and the different controversies are reflected to the life in these letters, which bear in every case on some definite situation.

Reference has been made already to the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Fourth Gospel — two very distinct writings which may yet for our present object be classed together. The Epistle declares its purpose quite unmistakably, but the Gospel is also an Apology, to a greater extent, perhaps, than

has commonly been realised. Its defence of Christianity as the absolute religion is combined, as we shall see, with allusions of a more specific nature to the disputes of the time.

There remain the Johannine Epistles and those other Epistles which may be grouped under the general head of Deutero-Pauline. These writings, with the exception of James and 1st Peter, which are mainly hortative, all appear to combat certain early forms of the Gnostic movement. They deal from different points of view with different manifestations of the movement, which yet presented everywhere the same characteristic features.

Revelation is a book apart. In no other book does the church so emphatically declare its hostility to Judaism, heathenism, and the heretical sects. But the relation is one of pure antagonism, and there is nowhere any attempt at a reasoned defence.

LECTURE II

JESUS AS THE MESSIAH

JESUS had been condemned to death as a false Messiah, and the immediate task that fell to His disciples was to vindicate Him from the charge of imposture. It was useless to attempt any proclamation of His message while the personal claim on which His authority rested had, to all appearance, been found wanting. Christianity had already perished with its Founder, unless His followers could prove to an unbelieving world that He was indeed the Christ.

During the earliest period, therefore, all controversy turned on the single question of the Messiahship. The knowledge that what Jesus had given was nothing less than a new

religion did not dawn, except very gradually, on the minds of His disciples. He Himself had never formally broken with Jewish law and custom. His teaching had been expressed under Jewish modes of thought, and contained little that seemed on the surface to be inconsistent with Judaism. The disciples, on their part, had grown to manhood in the traditional faith, and were not prepared to discern the hidden drift of their Master's teaching. Although after His death they formed themselves into a separate community they had no intention of throwing off the yoke of the Law. They asked to be recognised as a Jewish sect, and strove to maintain their connection with Judaism in spite of all repulses. They were unconscious of any departure from the ordinary beliefs of their countrymen except on the one question of the Messianic right of Jesus.

This single difference, however, was the germ that contained in it the whole future development of Christianity. The acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah led to the consecration

of His words and example, and to a deeper reflection on the significance of His work. In the process of this reflection it became ever more apparent that the gospel entailed a complete breach with orthodox Judaism. The original Messianic idea was itself, in course of time, transcended. It was found insufficient to convey the full import of the Saviour's life, and gave place to higher and more spiritual categories.

In its beginning, then, the church took its stand on the single issue that the national hope of the Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus. The larger questions involved in His coming were all subordinated to this one issue, which might appear at first sight a narrow and almost an artificial one. It was, however, of supreme importance to the new religion that the minds of men were concentrated from the outset, not so much on the message of Jesus as on His Person. In the natural course of events He Himself would have faded into a dim memory, like the other great figures in history,

while His gospel might have survived for a time as one of the many ethical systems and finally have disappeared. But the question of the Messiahship gave prominence from the very first to the fact of His Person. The church was compelled to defend Him, and in defending Him to understand Him better, and reach out to higher conceptions of what it possessed in Him. It became more and more apparent that Jesus in His own Person was the revelation of God, and that all His work was to be interpreted in the light of Himself.

Our knowledge of the earliest activity of the church is derived almost solely from the introductory chapters of the book of Acts. This portion of the narrative is no doubt coloured with legendary elements; but we may accept with a fair degree of confidence the speeches ascribed to Peter. They present a kind of summary of the primitive teaching as it was still remembered when the church had advanced to a larger comprehension of

its message. In these speeches of Peter, addressed to his countrymen at Jerusalem immediately after the Crucifixion, the whole stress is laid on the Messianic issue. Peter takes for granted that the Jewish faith is permanently valid, and confines himself to proving that the expected Messiah has at last appeared in Jesus of Nazareth.

His argument takes its departure from the spiritual phenomena which had manifested themselves for the first time on the day of Pentecost. According to a well-known prophecy the commencement of the Messianic age was to be marked by an outpouring of the Spirit, not only on a few chosen messengers as heretofore, but on the whole people of God (Joel ii. 28). The sudden enthusiasm which had sprung up in the Christian community was explained in relation to this prophecy. The Spirit had come, and with it the opening of the new age; and Jesus, whose work was now declaring itself, could be no other than the Messiah. Paul in later days

was to elaborate the doctrine of the Spirit into one of the most fruitful and profound ideas in Christian theology. At the beginning, the Spirit was identified solely with the abnormal phenomena, and these were chiefly prized on account of their evidential value. The church in which this new mysterious power was universally active could only be the Messianic community foretold by the prophet.

Starting, then, with the evidence afforded by the coming of the Spirit, Peter goes on to demonstrate, by still more decisive proofs, that Jesus was the Messiah. His chief argument is the fact of the Resurrection, by which God had reversed the condemnation passed on Jesus by His countrymen. Through that unique act of divine power He had been solemnly declared to be the true Messiah and invested with a supreme kingship. And the crowning witness of the Resurrection was borne out by the whole character of the life which had led up to it. Jesus had been One whom it was not possible for death to hold.

He had approved Himself by miracles and signs as something more than man. He had given fulfilment to the anticipations of Old Testament prophecy. The Jews are to see in Him the culmination of their history as the people of God. From Moses and Samuel onward, their prophets had looked forward to this Messiah who had now appeared.

In our Synoptic Gospels we find the same arguments worked out more fully, with the help of concrete illustration. The Messiah, according to the current expectation, was to signalise His advent by wonderful works, which would plainly mark out His higher dignity. A large place is therefore assigned in all the three Gospels to the miracles of Jesus. These were the promised "signs," by which, even in His lifetime, His people ought to have been able to recognise Him. Hardly less importance is assigned to the fulfilment by Him of the various prophecies. He was born at Bethlehem, of the lineage of David. His manner of life was that of the Lord's

servant, who would not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. His method of teaching by parables was foretold in the psalms and the prophets. Even His death, which seemed to render belief in Him impossible, was accompanied, in all its minutest details, with the fulfilment of well known words of scripture. Not only do the evangelists lay emphasis on the Messianic aspects of the life of Jesus, but they are careful to explain its apparent failure, in some respects, to satisfy the traditional hope. If Jesus did not assert Himself as a political king, it was because He deliberately put aside this lower method of effecting His purpose. If His message met with little acceptance, the fault was not in Him but in the hardness of men's hearts. If His life was outwardly humble, the lowliness was more than counterbalanced by the moral authority, which was confessed not only by men but by the world of spirits. The accounts of the casting out of demons, which form so marked a feature in the

Synoptic narratives, are evidently meant to serve an apologetic purpose (*cf.* Lk. xi. 20). Jesus, though men were blind to Him, was yet recognised by the spiritual powers, who felt themselves subdued by His mere word. In like manner an explanation is offered of the different incidents of the Passion, which seemed so hopelessly inconsistent with the claim to Messiahship. Jesus was overcome by His enemies like a weak man, but His non-resistance was part of His voluntary submission to what He perceived to be the will of God. He was condemned as an evil doer, but even His judge acknowledged His complete innocence. The death He suffered had been foreseen by Him in all its circumstances; and His enemies in their apparent conquest of Him were only the unconscious instruments of a divine plan. Thus, as we read between the lines in the Synoptic Gospels, we can perceive that they are influenced throughout by a definite apologetic intention. They present the church's answer to the

ordinary Jewish polemic, by which it was sought to prove from the life of Jesus that He could not be the Christ.

The fact of the Crucifixion was from the beginning the chief stumbling-block. It could not be denied that this Messiah had suffered death—a death which, to Jewish sentiment, was peculiarly revolting. The words of mockery which had been thrown at Him on the Cross were repeated afterwards in a hundred different forms: “He saved others: Himself He could not save.” No other proof seemed to be necessary that His claims were utterly baseless. The controversy was thus narrowed down to one all-decisive issue. How could the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah be reconciled with the insuperable fact of His Cross?

It would appear that the disciples themselves had, for the moment, been staggered in their belief by the Master’s death. The hope had been growing in their minds to a

certainly that this was He who should redeem Israel, when, all at once, it seemed to be shattered in the great catastrophe. It was the appearance before them of the risen Christ which not only revived their belief, but dissipated the last shade of doubt. In the accounts of the Resurrection that have come down to us there may be many discrepancies and even a palpable overgrowth of legend; but no criticism can assail the essential fact that something happened, shortly after our Lord's death, which sufficed to convince His disciples that He had arisen and was still alive. This mysterious event, whatever may have been its nature, was henceforth their chief argument in face of the world's unbelief. Peter, in his speech at Pentecost, takes his stand upon it; and in the more developed doctrine of Paul it still remains the ultimate proof. All the theological demonstration of the divine significance of Jesus is grounded in the historical fact that He rose again from the dead.

The Resurrection threw a light back on

the mystery of the death. It was apparent now that the Cross, so far from degrading Jesus, had been the occasion of the sovereign display of His power. His death, however unintelligible it might seem to human eyes, was a necessary moment in His work as a whole. There was a deeper meaning in it which the world was called on to ponder and understand. Possessed with this conviction, the disciples were no longer content with proving that the Cross was not derogatory to the Messianic claim. They advanced a further step and took up the bold position that Jesus had accomplished His work as the Messiah precisely by His death. To reject the Gospel of the Cross implied a blindness to that which constituted the very essence of the Messiahship.

The proof of this contention was sought in Old Testament prophecy. We read in Luke's Gospel how the risen Christ, on the way to Emmaus, expounded to His two disciples the scriptures concerning Himself,—showing them

that it behoved the Christ to suffer (Lk. xxiv. 46). The incident, whatever be its historical foundation, bears witness to the consciousness of the Apostles that they had obtained a new insight into the hidden import of scripture. Looking back on prophecy in the light of its fulfilment, they perceived that it everywhere anticipated a Messiah who would effect His purpose through suffering and death. To establish this view it was necessary to have recourse to new and, in some respects, arbitrary methods of interpretation. A Messianic purport was read into sayings which did not bear this sense to the Old Testament writers. Passages which describe the righteous man were referred to the Messiah as the perfectly righteous One (Jn. ii. 17; Rom. xv. 3); verses in the Psalms were construed as Messianic, on the ground that David, though speaking in his own person, was thinking of another, ideal David (Acts ii. 25-35). In particular, Isaiah's great prophecy of the Suffering Servant was accepted as Messianic,

and supplied the chief basis for the Christian argument. The interpretation of this prophecy had already troubled the Jewish expositors, who doubted, like the Ethiopian eunuch, whether the prophet spoke of himself or of some other man. To the Apostles there was no longer room for doubt. The Lord's Servant was the Christ, who had been predestined in the divine plan to suffer, and by suffering to become the Saviour of His people.

These passages of Isaiah not only established the necessity of the Cross, as the fore-ordained fulfilment of the Messiah's work, but also explained the reason of that necessity. Jesus Himself had claimed the power, in His lifetime, to forgive sins. His message had been above all a message of forgiveness, and those who heard Him most gladly were the publicans and sinners, whom the Law had declared outcast. According to a saying which is preserved by Mark and Matthew (Mt. xx. 28; Mk. x. 45), and repeated more

explicitly in Matthew's account of the Last Supper (Mt. xxvi. 28), He had spoken of His approaching death as of a ransom which would avail for sin. With the help of the Old Testament prophecy this aspect of the Saviour's work was apprehended more clearly. His great gift to men, as the church now learned to recognise, had been the remission of sins, and He had bestowed it through His death. There can be little doubt that the central doctrine of Paul had been in some measure anticipated by the elder Apostles as the true solution of the doctrine of the Cross. It behoved the Christ to suffer, for He could not fulfil His Messianic work apart from an atoning death.

Thus in various directions the church endeavoured to overcome Jewish unbelief; but the attempt, in the nature of things, could only be half successful. To all the arguments the Jews could fairly reply that this was not the Messiah whom the nation had expected. A few detached prophecies, doubtfully in-

terpreted, could not outweigh the whole Messianic tradition as it had grown up through the centuries of waiting. In the effort to bring its belief into line with that tradition, the church came gradually to realise that it had embarked on a hopeless task. The Messianic idea required to be radically transformed before it could furnish a true interpretation of the work and Person of Jesus.

The question here arises as to the nature of the Messianic claim as our Lord Himself understood it. That He made the claim may be regarded as certain, in spite of the contention of some modern scholars that He never professed to be more than a reformer and prophet. If every other indication in the Gospels were explained away, there still remains the fact that He was put to death, on a charge which only admits of one construction. It is certain, moreover, that within the limits of contemporary Jewish thought no other form than that of the Messianic idea was open to

Him, whereby to proclaim His message of the Kingdom of God. To have declined the rôle of Messiah would have been to frustrate His mission, to undertake a work of which He refused to accept the responsibility. He was compelled, whether He would or not, to come forward as the Messiah ; but it seems evident that while assuming the title He was conscious of its insufficiency. There is no stronger proof of the trustworthiness of our gospel records than this,—that although it was the paramount interest of the early church to assert the Messiahship of Jesus, He is Himself represented as evading or half-concealing His right. He would not accept the traditional title until He had informed it, in some measure, with a new content. He wished to have it interpreted through His own life and teaching, and not, conversely, to have His work explained by means of a current idea with which He could not find Himself in entire sympathy.

It needs to be remembered that the title of Messiah was already a somewhat vague and

elastic one. Long before the New Testament period, the deeper minds of the nation had become dissatisfied with the popular conception of a warrior king who would restore the ancient glories of the house of David. They had endeavoured so to modify the conception as to bring it into harmony with new religious ideals. In the time of our Lord there were almost as many different anticipations of the Messiah as there were schools of thought in Israel. Pharisees, Zealots, Essenes, the educated classes and the common people, the politicians and the "quiet in the land," had all their several beliefs concerning the Coming One in whom the national hopes were to reach fulfilment. He was conceived, now as a conqueror or a judge; now as a high-priest or a supreme prophet; now as a divine being who was to inaugurate a new order on the earth. These various conceptions were all of one type in so far as they were national and external in their main interest; otherwise they differed widely from each other, and

their existence side by side had given a certain plasticity to the Messianic idea. The view has been sometimes advanced that Jesus assumed the name of Messiah in unworthy compliance with popular expectations, and was thus hurried into a course which was alien to the true character of His mission. But His acceptance of the title, so various in its connotation, did not commit Him to any given line of action. It was permissible to Him, as to the writers of Enoch or 4th Esdras, to employ the traditional form as the vehicle for an entirely new conception.

From His self-designation of "Son of man" it has been too hastily inferred that He simply took over the interpretation of the Messianic idea which lay to His hand in the Apocalyptic literature. It is indeed practically certain that the mysterious name was borrowed from Daniel, and implied the conviction on the part of Jesus that He was divinely appointed to usher in the new order. He availed Himself of the Apocalyptic

speculations in so far as they had developed and partly spiritualised the Messianic hope of the Old Testament. But "Son of man" was itself a variable title. To the writer of Enoch it has a different meaning from that which it bears in Daniel, and our Lord in His turn was free to re-interpret it and adapt it to His own purpose. The question of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel, "Who is this Son of man" ("What kind of Son of man is this?") is indeed the crucial one. The conception itself is general and many-sided, and Jesus in adopting it imposed on it a new and peculiar character, which can only be partially explained from Apocalyptic usage.

We come back, then, to the position that Jesus entirely transformed the Messianic idea in the light of His own consciousness of His Person and message. Titles like "Messiah," "Son of man," lay ready to hand, as the accepted forms in which the religious aspirations of the Jewish people were embodied; and He borrowed the terms, but did not

hold Himself bound by any of their traditional meanings. Pursuing His own work in the manner prescribed to Him by His immediate sense of the Father's will, He intended that henceforth the names should bear another significance. He refrained from laying claim to the Messianic title until His disciples had learned, in some measure, to construe it afresh by their knowledge of His own personality. Thus the double name which was introduced by Paul, and afterwards passed into the common language of Christianity, gave true expression to the thought in our Lord's mind. He was "Jesus Christ," the Messiah whose character and vocation were henceforward to be interpreted through the historical life of Jesus.

It was in the process of controversy with the Jewish opposition that the disciples learned to apprehend the real nature of our Lord's Messianic claim. One thing at least became increasingly evident as time went on.

Before the name of Messiah could be ascribed to Jesus, it must be divested of that merely national significance which had hitherto been inseparable from it. The church of the earliest period still clung to the belief that the specific hopes of Israel were in some manner to reach their fulfilment through Jesus. He had come in the first instance for those who were the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God had made with the fathers (Acts iii. 25, 26). If the Jews had rejected Him, it was through ignorance, and the way was still open to them to embrace Him, in the light of a fuller knowledge, as the promised Deliverer. But they had persisted in their rejection; and in face of their definite attitude of opposition, it became more and more impossible to associate the work of Jesus with the national hopes of Israel. The church was loth to depart from the currently accepted ideas, and endeavoured at first to spiritualise them, while adhering, as far as might be, to their outward form.

It was claimed, on the one hand, that the deliverance promised through the Messiah was not an external, temporal deliverance. He was to save His people from their sins, to effect an entrance for them into a higher life. The glowing prophecies of a future triumph to be vouchsafed to Israel had been, in the deeper sense, fulfilled. It was the people who had misunderstood them, in referring them to a mere political restoration. On the other hand, it was maintained that the "Israel" to which the Messianic blessings had been promised was not the nation. The prophets of the Old Testament had already drawn a distinction between the people as a whole and the "remnant"—the faithful servants of God who constituted the real heart of Israel. This remnant had now its representative in the Christian church. The true seed of Abraham were those who shared in His faith, and outward descent had ceased to be anything but a secondary condition. Jesus had therefore fulfilled the Messianic

anticipation, although His countrymen had rejected Him. He had come as a Saviour to the spiritual community, which in the plan of God had ever been the true Israel.

In these two ways the Messianic conception was inwardly transformed, and rendered more adequate to the revelation in Jesus. The church had failed to establish its original claim that the prophecies of the Old Testament had been literally fulfilled. But this very failure led to a deeper insight into the real purpose of Jesus. It was discovered that in assuming the Messianic title He had stamped it with a new meaning, commensurate with the world-wide and spiritual character of His work.

With Paul we enter on a new phase in the reconstruction of the Messianic idea. Paul was not a man of the people, like the first disciples, but a trained theologian, familiar with the speculations set forth in the Apocalyptic books. The Messiah whom he had learned to anticipate was the Man from

Heaven—a being of angelic nature who would descend out of the higher world. When once he had acknowledged the claim of Jesus, Paul transferred to Him the attributes which were associated with the heavenly Messiah. He assumed that Jesus had existed from all time with God, that His earthly life was nothing but an obscure interval between the glory out of which He had come and the glory to which He had returned. The question of the correspondence of the gospel history with the ancient prophecies was of little importance to Paul; for the true nature of the Messiah could not, in any case, be revealed by the appearance in the flesh. It was enough to be assured of the one fact that Jesus had risen from the dead, thereby manifesting Himself with power as the Son of God. That was the decisive evidence, beside which all other was secondary and superfluous.

It might appear at first sight as if Paul's conception implied a falling back on the traditional forms of Jewish belief. The church was

slowly learning to re-interpret the Messianic idea by the actual history of Jesus, and Paul forced its thinking into a different channel. He started from a preconceived notion which he had taken over from Apocalyptic Judaism, and sought to apply it to the Christian revelation in entire disregard of the facts. But when we examine deeper we find that Paul, like the elder Apostles, set out from the historical life of Jesus, which was summed up for him in the culminating incident of the death on the Cross. With the new light that had thus streamed in upon him he went back to his previous conception of the Messiah. The Man from Heaven was henceforth identified in his mind with Jesus and bore His character.

Our Lord Himself in His effort to escape from the limitations of the popular Messianism had claimed to be the Son of man foretold in the book of Daniel. The higher Apocalyptic view, though still inadequate, came nearer to His own consciousness of His Person and work

than the prevailing idea of a national Deliverer. Paul brought back the doctrine of the Messiahship into the path indicated by Jesus Himself, and by so doing prepared the way for a truer and richer development. It now became possible to advance beyond the Jewish Messianic idea altogether, and to conceive of Jesus under categories which expressed more perfectly His relations to God and the world. This advance was finally determined by two causes—an external and an inward religious one.

1. In the first place, the need became always more urgent of presenting Christianity to a Gentile public, unacquainted with Jewish theology and tradition. The Apocalyptic idea of the Messiah could be separated, without much difficulty, from purely national associations; but even so it conveyed little meaning to the Gentile mind. A convert from heathenism was unable to grasp the distinction between God and a heavenly being who nevertheless was not God. When he applied the

name "Son of God" to Jesus, he understood it in a literal sense, as it might be used of one of the heathen deities. Paul himself, in spite of his austere monotheism, could not expound his gospel to the Gentiles without falling insensibly into their modes of thought. Again and again he appears to break away from his original conception and to press the idea of Sonship to its full extent. In Jesus Christ, God has freely given us His own Son. While we were yet sinners Christ died on our behalf; and this sacrifice of His Son is the measure of God's love toward us.

2. But a still more powerful motive was the inward need of faith, which could not be satisfied with anything short of the loftiest interpretation of the Person of Christ. What was sought for in Christianity was an immediate fellowship with God, and it was felt, as a simple fact of experience, that through Jesus Christ this fellowship had been rendered possible. The Messianic idea could afford no explanation of such a fact. Between an

angelic being, however exalted, and the absolute God, there was still an infinite distance, and all attempts to bridge it over were inevitably futile. There needed to be some deeper relation between Jesus and God if the Father was truly present in the Son, bringing the believer into communion with Himself. The growth of this conviction is traceable in the writings of Paul. He accepts the Messianic category, but we feel all the time that it is external to his thought, which centres in the belief that God Himself has apprehended him through Christ. We have repeated indications, even in the earlier and undoubted Epistles, that he is seeking his way towards some other theory of Christ's Person, which should correspond more adequately with the demands of Christian faith.

This larger conception, which eventually displaced that of the Messiahship, was suggested by the current Alexandrian philosophy. It is impossible to follow out with any exactness

the process by which the doctrine of the Logos was transplanted from Alexandria and acclimatised in Christian thought. We can infer from the manner in which it is introduced in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, that it was already familiar; and its influence is pervasive in several of the earlier writings where it is not expressly formulated. Christianity indeed inherited this doctrine by a sort of natural right. Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, had attempted the task of reconciling Greek speculation with the religious teaching of the Old Testament. In the Logos of the Stoics he discovered a middle term, which seemed at once to connote the creative Word of Genesis and the immanent Reason, which, according to the Greek thinkers, was the ultimate principle of the world. He conceived of God as working through the Logos, which he defined vaguely, —sometimes as a power within God, yet ideally separable from Him; sometimes as God Himself, in His active as distinguished

from His transcendent being. The Alexandrian doctrine had been accepted by enlightened Jews as the philosophy of their religion, and Christianity fell heir to it. By the identification of Jesus with the Logos, the gospel could be translated into language intelligible to the Hellenic world.

A doctrine philosophical in its origin could not be applied to the facts of the gospel history without radical modifications. What to the Stoics, and even to Philo, was an abstract principle, was now apprehended as a personality. The idea of Reason was subordinated to that of divine self-utterance. The cosmical significance of the Logos was removed into the background. Little indeed was left of the original doctrine except the fundamental thought that the Logos was of the same nature and essence as God Himself; and this thought, with all its implications, was read into the historical fact of the life of Jesus.

From this time onward the Messianic idea

was virtually laid aside, and the name "Christ" was retained simply as a proper name, or as an alternative to the title of Son of God. In the Fourth Gospel there are frequent echoes of the various arguments by which the Messianic claim of Jesus was defended against the attacks of Jewish unbelief; but we have the feeling that the debate has now lost its real significance. The Evangelist has attained to a new conception of Jesus. He maintains the historical belief of the church in the Lord's Messiahship, but it no longer stands in vital relation to his faith. The Messianic idea has given way to the larger and profounder one, of an incarnation of the eternal Word.

Thus, within a single century, the issue on which the primitive community had staked its very existence was practically, if not formally, abandoned. The departure from the original position came about by a gradual development, and was inevitable. From the beginning, the

belief in Jesus as the Messiah contained in it the elements of a higher belief. A Messiah who had died upon the Cross, who had held aloof from the merely national interests, who had clothed Himself in no other royalty than that of love and holiness, was not the Messiah of the traditional hope. His claim to the world's love and obedience had either to be withdrawn altogether or to be grounded in new conceptions. It has to be acknowledged that in the great controversy which opened on the day of Pentecost, the Jews were so far in the right. They compelled the church to realise the inconsistencies of its primitive belief; and by so doing rendered it an incalculable service. For through their very failure to identify Jesus with the Messiah of current expectation, the disciples became aware that He was much more. He had not merely fulfilled the ancient prophecies, but had given a new revelation of the mind of God.

In departing, therefore, from the original Messianic idea, the church was not unfaithful

to the charge which had been laid upon it, but was simply carrying into effect the intention of Jesus Himself. He had accepted the name of Messiah, conscious all the time that it was approximate and provisional. It served to concentrate attention on His Person, but was in no sense the key to its significance. He meant from the first that His disciples should learn to know Him, not by the dim light of an old-world tradition, but by the contemplation of His own character and life. It was long before they guessed His purpose. They sought to force their belief in Him into the framework of the Messianic hope, and only desisted when the task had proved itself impossible. But the apparent defeat compelled them to fall back on the actual revelation. They thought of Jesus Himself as they had known Him in His earthly life, as they knew Him still in the secret fellowship of faith. The truth broke in upon them, more and more clearly, that He had disappointed the ancient hope because He had transcended it. Another

form was necessary, a larger and grander one, if they would explain the mystery of His life. Although it abandoned its first position, the church surrendered nothing. It only asserted more boldly, and with a fuller comprehension of its meaning, the true claim of Jesus Christ.

LECTURE III

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

THE Christian church as originally constituted was simply a Jewish sect, differing from orthodox Judaism in the single point that it recognised Jesus of Nazareth as the expected Messiah. We have seen, however, that this one point of difference was of infinite moment. The disciples, reflecting on the import of their confession that Jesus was the Christ, came ultimately to perceive that He had inaugurated a new religion, in which Judaism was for ever transcended.

The New Testament is largely occupied with the Jewish controversy into which the church was thrown from the very beginning. As a Jewish sect which was yet disowned by

official Judaism, it was forced to explain and justify its position; and the initial conflict regarding the Messianic claim of Jesus branched out into all manner of unexpected issues. Little by little the truth was driven home on the disciples that they had broken with the old tradition. The religion of Christ, derived as it was from Judaism, and employing its language and moulds of thought, was yet distinct from it in its whole character and aim.

The Jewish polemic in the New Testament is therefore of vital and far-reaching interest. In the course of that polemic Christianity first arrived at a true consciousness of itself, and learned to formulate its characteristic beliefs. Paul, the most creative mind that has ever appeared in the church, was engaged from first to last in the struggle with Judaism, and his thought can only be understood in relation to it. And the more we enter into the meaning of Paul's apology, the more it becomes apparent that Judaism was some-

thing else than one of the many types of ancient religion with which, by a historical accident, Christianity was involved in special controversy. It embodied what must ever be the main antitheses to the distinctive Christian ideas. The history of the church itself affords abundant proof that the Judaistic errors are precisely those into which our religion is wont to degenerate when it loses hold of its essential truths. Much, no doubt, in the Apostle's argument belongs to a bygone time. His greatest thoughts clothe themselves in terms and symbols from which we require to disengage them before the modern mind can grasp their significance. But in the last resort we have to deal in Paul's Epistles with a permanent strife between the Christian conception of religion and that which is always threatening to supplant it.

It was Paul who first laid bare the radical opposition of Judaism and Christianity ; but

it had existed from the outset. In our Lord's lifetime the Jewish teachers had discerned a tendency in His message which was subversive of the traditional creed. Jesus, it is true, did not formally throw off the yoke of Judaism. He submitted to the law and conformed with Jewish rites and customs. He expressly declared that He had not come to destroy but to fulfil. Yet in this fulfilment He dissolved the ancient religion and set another in its place, wholly different in its motive and spirit. In three well-marked directions we can trace this abrogation of Judaism, already implicit in the teaching of Jesus.

1. While accepting the ancient system as ordained by God Himself, He substituted the idea of an inward, self-determined obedience for that of statutory law. Man was to be governed no more by a commandment given from without, but was to bring himself into harmony with the will of God, and so to become his own lawgiver. The levitical

regulations were swept away by the great principle that that which cometh out of a man defileth a man. The decalogue was resolved into its simple elements of love to God and love to one's fellow-men. Even these two commandments were traced back to their ultimate spring in a renewed will, to which outward enactments should be no longer necessary.

2. In His conception of God, Jesus replaced the Jewish idea of a judge and king by that of a heavenly Father. The whole relation of man to God was thus presented under a new aspect. The elaborate system of ritual and ceremonies, guarding the approach of men to the divine King, was rendered useless; and the true worshippers were they who possessed the filial spirit of trust and love. Ideas of merit and reward were likewise superseded. God, as the forgiving Father, was willing to receive all who came back to Him in sincere repentance; and man, as the child of God, could ask for no higher recompense

than to please the Father and enter into closer fellowship with Him.

3. Jesus instituted a new order of moral values, at variance with those of Judaism and of all other ancient religions. The Sermon on the Mount consists throughout of a series of contrasts, of the character which belongs to the Kingdom of God with the ideal of the scribes and Pharisees. This new religious character was realised by Jesus in His own life, which henceforth became the measure of all true service of God. Righteousness before the Law ceased to have any worth or meaning when this higher righteousness had been manifested in Christ.

The breach with Judaism, therefore, was accomplished by our Lord Himself, even more radically than it afterwards was by Paul; but the full significance of His message was not at first apparent. It was only in the progress of the controversy regarding His Person that the nature of His work as a whole was subjected to a keener examination. The Jews,

on their part, were obliged to explain to themselves the instinct which had led them to reject Him. The disciples, in their very endeavour to prove His Messianic claim, became aware of the difficulties. Their belief in Him could only be justified by principles which had no place in ordinary Judaism, and which, in fact, destroyed it. Thus the antagonism which had been implicit from the first came gradually to declare itself. Judaism and Christianity stood over against each other as two distinct religions.

In the early chapters of Acts we find the church as yet unconscious that it could not pursue its mission within the limits of Jewish orthodoxy. Peter labours to make out that Christianity is nothing but the legitimate outcome of the ancestral faith. The Jewish people and their rulers had crucified Jesus in ignorance, and now when the evidence of His Messiahship is set clearly before them, they will accept Him gladly. They are the children

of the covenant, and through Christ they are to gain possession of their inheritance (Acts iii. 25, 26). Doubtless these speeches of Peter preserve a faithful reminiscence of the burden of Christian preaching in the earliest time. It sought to demonstrate that between Judaism and Christianity there was no intrinsic opposition. The people of the Law were by that very fact the heirs of the gospel, and were to welcome in Jesus the fulfilment of the hope of Israel.

It was the hostility of the Jews themselves that forced a separation of the church from the synagogue. The Jewish authorities perceived the real drift of the new movement when it was still hidden from the disciples, and their action made it necessary for the church to reconsider its entire position. With a true historical insight the writer of Acts has dwelt at length on the trial of Stephen, which marks the turning-point in the relations of Christianity to Judaism. Stephen was accused of blasphemy against God and Moses and the

Temple ; and his speech, under the form of a survey of the national history, is intended to answer these three charges. He holds that it was not the Christians but the Jews themselves who had been found unfaithful to the God of their fathers, and the Law of Moses, and the religion of the Temple. Their slaying of the Righteous One had been only the final expression of that spirit of disobedience to which all their records bore witness. This speech of Stephen still moves, at least to appearance, within the circle of the primitive Apologetic. The idea of an open breach with the Law has not yet suggested itself, and the argument aims at proving that Christianity stands in the true line of descent from the religion of the fathers. None the less we can recognise in Stephen the herald of a revolt. He has apprehended, in the first place, that the question of the Messiahship is only one aspect of a much wider issue. Christianity has to come to an understanding with the whole past of Judaism and with the religious ideals which

have found embodiment in it. Again, he departs from the conciliatory attitude which Peter had been careful to adopt in his original appeal to the Jewish people. Not only is their responsibility for the death of Christ urged home on them, but it is connected with the spirit which had pervaded their entire history as a nation. There had been something in the Jewish temper as it had asserted itself in all times, which was radically hostile to the will of God. Once more, the defence of Stephen reaches its climax in his answer to the charge that he had blasphemed the Temple. While admitting that the Temple had been built by divine ordinance, he declares plainly that it possessed nothing more than a typical and preparatory value. "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. What house will ye build me, saith the Lord, or where is the place of my rest?" This disparagement of the Temple, as belonging to a lower and transitory form of worship, implied a condemnation of the whole system

which it represented. The Law itself had not yet been impugned. Stephen speaks of it with reverence, as given by angels, and can lay no deadlier charge against the Jews than that they have not kept it. But the criticism of the Temple worship meant, in the last resort, an arraignment of the Law itself. Both belonged to an outworn, external conception of religion, which had now been done away in the gospel of Christ.

We pass, then, to Paul, who definitely effected that breach with Judaism which had been inevitable from the first, and which had latterly become imminent. To Paul, as to the primitive Apostles, the starting-point was the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. We have no reason to suppose that his conversion was preceded by a violent spiritual struggle, in which he came to realise the insufficiency of the Law to secure righteousness. A struggle there doubtless was; but it centred most probably on the single question "Was Jesus

the Messiah?" The discovery of the impotence of the Law was the consequence, not the cause, of the awakening on the way to Damascus. With his stronger intelligence and deeper religious insight, Paul perceived, as the elder Apostles had failed to do, the far-reaching issues involved in the acceptance of a crucified Messiah. It was not a question merely of adding one more to the beliefs he held already. If he acknowledged the claim of Jesus he saw that he must re-adjust his system of religious ideas from top to bottom. Judaism was at utter variance with the gospel, and no course was open to him but to break loose from it altogether. In his outward activity as an Apostle, Paul was obliged to fight over again the conflict which he had thus fought out in his own mind. Right onward from the beginning he found himself in controversy with Judaism, as represented by the Synagogue proper and by the Jewish party within the church. His undoubted Epistles have all, for their chief object, the vindication

of Christianity as against the older religion, from which, by his own agency, it was now finally severed.

To enter with any fulness into the Apologetic set forth in those Epistles would involve us in a complete examination of the Pauline theology. This would carry us beyond our scope; and we must confine our survey, as far as possible, to the immediate question before us. In what manner does Paul oppose what is characteristic in Christianity to the inward and essential principles of Judaism?

His reasoning is determined throughout by the general idea that the end of religion is to make possible to men a true communion with God. The bar to such communion is man's sinfulness; and every religion, therefore, must be tested by the one criterion, "How does it deal with the fact of sin? What means does it provide whereby a man can obtain deliverance from sin, and be at peace with God?" In his comparison of Christi-

anity and Judaism, Paul brings everything to this single issue. If the Law is powerless to make men righteous before God, then it has failed, and must give place to the religion by which sin can be truly overcome.

Sin, as Paul conceives it, is ultimately a fact of personal experience. In the seventh chapter of Romans he has described, with marvellous truth and vividness, the struggle of which every man is conscious in his own soul. Human nature is divided against itself, the lower instincts for ever obscuring the higher and frustrating the will in its endeavour towards better things. Paul had known this struggle, as he had also known the peace which had come to him through Christ. But in the working out of his doctrine he generalises the personal experience into a large, speculative conception. Sin is regarded, not merely as individual sinfulness, but as a world-wide power which masters each man because it holds dominion over the whole race. In all its separate manifestations it continues to

be a single principle, so that when it is once conquered at a central point its strength is broken. Under the antique forms of thought which lay to his hand, the Apostle gives a twofold expression to this idea of the unity and solidarity of sin. He connects it, in the first place, with Adam, as the father and representative of the human race. Sin, through all the generations since, has been nothing but the sin of Adam, endlessly repeating itself. Participating in Adam's nature, men have inherited the sin which had found lodgment in it. Yet, on the other hand, sin was not so much caused by Adam, as brought by him for the first time to manifestation. It has its real ground in the constitution of man's being, which is fleshly as well as spiritual. Sin takes occasion of this fleshly element in man to exercise dominion over him.

There can be little doubt that in his doctrine of the flesh as the stronghold of sin, Paul was largely influenced by the Greek theory that the material was intrinsically evil.

In the Old Testament, although man in his weakness is described as flesh, and so contrasted with God, who is Spirit, there is no suggestion of the essential sinfulness of the flesh. The body is considered, rather, as the necessary instrument of the spiritual life. But in the age immediately preceding Christ, Jewish speculation had been strongly affected by the Greek influence, and Paul accepts the Greek analysis of human nature. The flesh, however, is regarded by him as something more than the material body. It includes the whole natural life—the psychical being of man as opposed to the purely spiritual.

1. Paul sets himself to prove on the one hand that Judaism, relying on the Law, had been found wanting. Under the common name of Law he includes the whole body of Mosaic ordinances, ritual and ethical alike; and this to our mind may seem to involve a fatal confusion. It may be granted that works in the ceremonial sense are of

little religious value ; but what of obedience to the commandments, to which the Apostle's criticism equally applies ? We must remember, however, that the moral law, as understood by contemporary Judaism, was inextricably bound up with the code of ritual ; and still more, that it was itself external in character. It was obligatory, because it was written down in certain statutes delivered to Moses and imposed on men unconditionally from without. Between a moral law so conceived and a ceremonial system there was no essential difference.

The Law, therefore, with its outward rules and ordinances, was impotent to cope with sin. Paul's examination of it resolves itself into two main arguments, both of which go down to the very centre. He maintains, in the first place, that the religion of the Law mistakes the relation which must subsist between man and God. It assumes that man is in a position to *give* something to God, and thereby to establish a claim of merit on Him.

A task is thus laid on man which must be for ever beyond his power, for God's demand is infinite and can never be satisfied. Man cannot even attempt to satisfy it, for, strictly speaking, he has nothing to give. In consequence of his fleshly nature he is inherently sinful, and there dwells in him no good thing that he can offer to God. All the result of his effort to attain to righteousness by means of the Law is either a bitter sense of despair, or else a vain pride and self-complacency which are utterly alien to the spirit of true religion. The only attitude which can befit a man in presence of the all-holy God is that of the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" In the second place, the Law is futile because, while it states a demand, it cannot impart the power by which its demand can be fulfilled. The more loftily we conceive of it as the expression of the divine will, the more useless it becomes to us. For we must always reckon with the fact of the radical weakness of human nature. Man is flesh, and

cannot conform to the holy will of God, however clearly and definitely it may be set before him in a written law. There needs first to be a new power bestowed upon him, supporting his higher will in its vain struggle with the flesh.

Thus far the Apostle's argument is clear and convincing, but he raises a side issue which tends to obscure and weaken it. Paul the Christian could never shake himself entirely free from the prepossessions of Paul the Jew. Insisting as he does that the Law belongs to a bygone order of things, he is yet constrained to think of it with something of the old reverence. The Law is holy ; given by God, it expresses His eternal will, and cannot be simply put aside. God Himself, in His desire to forgive mankind, must needs take account of the Law and ensure that its requirements are satisfied. Much of Paul's theology has no other purpose than to reconcile his new position as a Christian with the Jewish conception of the Law, which had now, if he had fully examined his ultimate

belief, ceased to have any meaning to him.

In two ways he seeks to assert the inviolable worth of the Law, while at the same time claiming that it has been done away by Christ. First, he proves from scripture that the promise was before the Law, and formed the original and fundamental covenant of God with man. The Law was therefore of the nature of an interlude. Within the period from Moses to Christ it reigned paramount ; but now the intermediate stage was ended, and the authority of the promise was restored. The Law had not been thrown aside, but had simply yielded, when its work was done, to that which was prior and more comprehensive in the counsel of God. Secondly, Paul argues that men had mistaken the real purpose of the Law. He shrinks from affirming that the Law, appointed by God Himself, had been ineffectual. On the contrary, it had fully accomplished its purpose—which was not to abolish sin, for this it had manifestly

failed to do, but to reveal and intensify it. Sin was dormant; it could not appear in its exceeding sinfulness as conscious guilt, until the Law was given which expressly forbade it. Not only so, but the Law, in seeking to restrain the fleshly nature, had irritated it into active rebellion, and had so increased sin. Paul declares that this effect was deliberately planned by God. Before sin could be overcome through Christ, it required to be forced to a head, and for this purpose God had bestowed the Law.

In this dialectic there are no doubt many incidental ideas which are true and valuable, but we have to acknowledge that it impairs the central argument. By his anxiety to uphold the sanctity of the Law, which nevertheless he had discarded, Paul compromised his position. He encumbered the defence of Christianity with a difficulty which was wholly superfluous. In all his thinking, however, Paul is still haunted by his Jewish conscience. Discerning clearly that the Law, as a defective instrument, must now be thrown aside, he

feels himself obliged at every turn to make terms with it, preserving to it some shadow of authority, while declaring in the same breath that its day is past.

2. We pass now from Paul's criticism of the Law to his positive argument, that what the Law had failed to do had now been accomplished through Christ. The Cross, as we have seen, had been associated from the beginning with ideas of ransom and forgiveness; and Paul himself mentions, as one of the few things he had received from Christian tradition, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures (1 Cor. xv. 3). This belief was taken up by him, and brought into the light of his own spiritual experience, and became the centre of his whole life and faith. He was convinced that the grand problem of religion had been solved once for all in Christianity. Here at last the means was provided by which sin could be overcome, and a true fellowship with God made possible.

It is fairly evident that Paul, in his doctrine of the Cross, considers sin from two points of view, which are never brought into real relation. He is thinking, on the one hand, of the *guilt* of sin. How can man escape the condemnation which he has justly deserved? How can he hope, in his sinfulness, to be received into love and favour by the holy God? On the other hand, he is concerned with the *power* of sin. Man, as a fleshly creature, is sold under a bondage—how can it be broken? Is it possible for sin to be not only forgiven but conquered and destroyed? The chief difficulties in Paul's thought arise from his confusion of these two questions, which are really separate. His view of salvation is worked out along two lines, by means of two categories of thought, which have nothing in common, and yet are continually blended together.

(1) First we have the doctrine of justification, properly so called, in which Paul maintains that the *guilt* of sin has been removed by the

Cross. The Jewish Law had sought to bring man into a true relation to God, and had failed, since it threw the whole burden upon man himself. How could he, by any righteousness of his own, satisfy the infinite demand of God and so purchase His favour? The gospel offered righteousness as a *gift*. God of His free grace had placed men in a new relation towards Him,—a relation in which their sins were counted against them no longer. Instead of a righteousness of their own to which they can never hope to attain, they are endowed with this righteousness of God.

It is through the death of Christ that the new relation between God and men is established. The death was an expiatory sacrifice, fulfilling the claim of the Law, but it also had a positive significance. God declared by it, as in a solemn forensic act, that the barriers were now removed. He had forgiven men; He had bestowed on them a righteousness wherewith they might come into His presence. All that was henceforth required of them was to

accept His gift by faith. In the teaching of Paul, faith and the grace of God are thus correlative terms. Faith, although it manifests itself in the belief that Christ died for us, is no mere assent to a given doctrine. It is the trust in God—in His entire love and forgiveness—which is awakened in us by the knowledge of the Cross. It is the receptivity on our part which answers to the gracious purpose of God and welcomes His free gift.

Thus far the death of Christ, explained in the light of Jewish ideas of sacrifice and vicarious merit, secures nothing more than a formal justification. Sin is no longer counted, but it is not removed. God only bestows, if we may say so, a factitious righteousness, which enables sinful men to draw near to Him. It was objected by Jewish opponents in Paul's own lifetime, and on a surface view correctly, that such a doctrine afforded a pretext for evil living. Men were taught to abandon all moral effort; they were encouraged to believe that in spite of their manifest sins they possessed a

higher kind of righteousness. But this assurance, as Paul perceived, was a necessary condition to the new life. He felt, as every deep religious nature must feel, that he was powerless to set himself right with God; and the burden of guilt lay on him like a nightmare, hopelessly crushing all the springs of endeavour. It was God's declaration that the sin would be no longer reckoned which made him a different man. He was now relieved of the paralysing sense of guilt, and could serve God henceforth with an enthusiastic love and confidence. When he had once entered into this new relation to God all things became possible. Life was no more a weary unceasing struggle against old debt that could never be paid, for the debt was cancelled. He could make a fresh beginning, with a clear conscience and a living hope.

(2) Parallel, however, with the doctrine of justification we can trace another, which is no less vital in the Pauline theology. The Apostle conceived of the Cross as the removal,

by God's act of grace, not only of the guilt but of the power of sin. Here also the argument is presented under forms of thought which are largely alien to the modern mind, but the underlying thought is none the less true and profound.

We must bear in mind, on the one hand, the significance attached to Christ as the second Adam. He was the representative of the race,—summed it up, so to speak, in His own Person,—and whatever was done by Him was of universal efficacy. And, on the other hand, He was sinless; and His death cannot be regarded, like that of others, as the mere recompense—the inevitable counterpart—of individual sin. It must have possessed some higher and positive value.

Paul interprets its value by means of his theory of the flesh as the principle in human nature which makes for sin. Christ assumed flesh in order that He might destroy it. His physical death had a spiritual significance, for it was the destruction in flesh, which was its

stronghold, of the world-wide dominion of sin. The victory won by Christ availed for all, since all could participate in the representative act whereby flesh and sin were overcome.

Here again Faith is the condition on which the work of Christ becomes valid for each individual disciple. By faith we can identify ourselves with Christ. His death becomes ours; the power of sin, as it subsists in our own flesh, is conquered, since we share in His victory over the universal principle of flesh. Faith merges itself, therefore, in that union with Christ in which Paul discovers the ultimate fact of the Christian life. The believer is associated with Christ in His Crucifixion, and has part in its result; and as he dies with Christ, so he rises again with Him in the power of a new life. All members of the race may by faith unite themselves with the second Adam, and the might of His spiritual nature becomes operative in them.

It is not difficult to apprehend the vital idea in this doctrine, set forth though it is

under categories of thought which have now, in great part, lost their meaning. The Apostle is conscious that in Jesus Christ a new power has entered the world. The life of Christ, which disclosed its inward purpose in His death, was the revelation of a higher spiritual order; and by faith in Christ we can possess ourselves of the mind and will which dwelt in Him. No efforts of our own could deliver us from the limitations that belong to our very nature; but the spirit of Christ renews our nature. The law of life works in us, in place of the existing law of sin and death. So Paul is simply expressing, in terms of an antique theology, the religious fact which he had proved in his own experience. He was aware that since he had given himself to Christ, a new, regenerating force was active in him. What the Law could not do was now accomplished for him by God Himself, who had imparted a higher spirit to men through Jesus Christ.

“We are not under the Law but under Grace.” In these words Paul gathers to a point his whole argument as against Judaism. It was vain to set an ideal of righteousness before men and command them to fulfil it, while they were still carnal, sold under sin. The Law at best could only enable them to feel, more despairingly than before, that they were utterly helpless, and must ever fall short of the glory of God. If man was to obtain deliverance and enjoy fellowship with God, God Himself must intervene by an act of free grace. He must lift men into a new relation to Himself, and endue them with the might of a new spirit. In Jesus Christ, God had revealed Himself as the Giver, and men were only required to accept the gift—yielding themselves to His love and forgiveness, that He might work in them of His good pleasure.

Christianity and Judaism are thus contrasted as the religion of grace, demanding faith as its one condition, and the religion of outward enactment, which can only be satis-

fied by works. It follows from this fundamental difference that the two religions are on every side opposed to one another. (1) They belong to two separate orders. Christianity is spiritual, while Judaism, in spite of its lofty pretensions, is only the highest of the nature religions. When the Galatians, converted from heathenism, have been seduced into obedience to the Law, Paul declares that they have turned again to the "elements of this world." They have subjected themselves to what was visible and external, and have become children or slaves instead of free men. Those who have been justified through Christ have passed out of bondage into liberty. They are sons of God and have their citizenship in heaven, and are sovereign over all external things. They have attained to the clear self-consciousness and self-determination which are the birthright of spiritual beings, and can judge all things while they themselves are judged of no man. (2) The worship required in Christianity is likewise different

from that of Judaism. Since God has called us into a new relation to Himself, the former modes of approach to Him have lost their value. Rites and ceremonies are no more necessary. God has sent His Spirit into our hearts, whereby we say "Abba, Father." We can offer Him a purely spiritual service, arising directly out of trust and love. (3) The new relation to God involves a new morality. God enjoins His will on men, no longer by hard - and - fast commandments, given from without, but by His living Spirit in our hearts. The Christian, therefore, is his own lawgiver. He possesses in himself a higher law which he obeys by his own free choice, and which can adapt itself with an endless elasticity to all changing circumstances and times. The nature of this inward law is best illustrated by Paul's own decisions on the many unforeseen problems and difficulties which met him continually in his missionary work. He has no need to fall back on any traditional rules, not even on the sayings of

Christ Himself. He has an unerring guide in the Christian conscience within him, and can accept its dictates as if they had been directly spoken by the Lord.

The controversy with Judaism which is thus reflected for us in the letters of Paul, had its outcome in two great practical conclusions. In the first place, it was clearly demonstrated that Christianity was no mere phase of Jewish belief, but a new religion. Christ had died and risen again that He might be the first-born among many brethren, that He might originate a new community, pervaded by His Spirit. He was the second Adam. His entrance into human history was as decisive as the creation of the first man; and the whole race henceforth took its descent from Him as from another Head. Through all the Epistles of Paul there runs the lofty consciousness that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things have become new.

Again, it was made evident that as Christianity was a new, so it was a universal religion. According to the narrative in the book of Acts (xxii. 21) the conviction that he must preach the gospel to the Gentiles was given to Paul as an immediate sequel to his conversion. Whether this be literal history or not, it expresses a fact which is abundantly certain. The Apostle's assurance that the gospel was world-wide in its appeal was not merely forced upon him by events, but was bound up with his radical conception. The grace of God in Christ addressed itself to men as sinners. There ceased to be any distinction between Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free. The gospel was God's answer to the universal, elementary need of man, and all men alike were capable of receiving it. Circumcision availed nothing nor uncircumcision, but faith which works by love.

It was Paul who brought the conflict with

Judaism to a head, and with him it may be said to close. The controversy indeed bulks largely in the later writings of the New Testament, but it hinges no more on central issues. For example, in the Fourth Gospel, while a polemic with the Jews is everywhere discernible, no attempt is made to set the cardinal principles of Christianity over against those of Judaism. The evangelist is concerned almost wholly with points of detail in the contemporary debates between church and synagogue. He assumes the conclusions of Paul as fully established, and proceeds to build a new structure on this foundation. The Epistle to the Hebrews might seem, on the surface, to continue along somewhat different lines the argument of Paul. It takes the outward form of an elaborate comparison between the Jewish ceremonial worship and the spiritual realities which had come to light in Christianity. But, as we shall see later, the writer's chief interest is not so much to exalt the new revelation above the old, as to prove its claim to be the absolute

religion. That the struggle with Judaism has now ended is evident from the fact that he does not assail it, but is willing to concede its partial truth, as a system of types and symbols, foreshadowing the reality which had appeared in Christ. Such a concession was only possible when the acute danger from the side of Judaism had been overcome. The church had finally accepted Paul's contention that the Law had been done away, and that through Christ men had entered into a higher relation towards God.

This dying out of the conflict was largely due, no doubt, to external causes. The downfall of the Jewish state had rendered the old antagonism less formidable. The transference of Christianity to the world of Greco-Roman culture had thrown it into new and more urgent controversies, among which the opposition of the Synagogue held only a minor place. But the chief reason why the struggle closed with Paul was simply that Paul had conquered. He had severed Christi-

anity from the Law, and had made clear, once and for ever, that it was a new religion with a new principle at the heart of it. So completely had Paul triumphed, that his position became in a great measure unintelligible within a generation after his death. It appeared to the mind of the church self-evident that the Law was now a dead letter—that the system of ordinances had ceased to have any validity, and that salvation could be only through the gift of God in Jesus Christ. The effort of Paul to assert those truths in the face of Jewish hostility no longer possessed a living interest; and while the results he had won were incorporated into Christian belief, the key to his reasoning was lost.

In a deeper sense, however, the battle which opened with Paul has ever since continued. The Christian conception of religion has always been opposed by the legal, external conception which was typified in Judaism. In the century succeeding Paul, the gospel

itself was construed as a "nova lex," similar in its demand and character to the law of Moses; and the whole system against which Paul made his protest was established again, with only a thin disguise, in the Catholic church. Luther re-discovered the central Pauline idea; but in Protestantism also the religion of the letter, of submission to some outward yoke of bondage, has never ceased to maintain itself, over against the religion of the Spirit. The Judaism which was the ultimate object of Paul's attack had its ground in certain permanent tendencies of human nature; and for this reason, if for no other, the Epistles are of lasting significance and value. A time will never be in which it will not be necessary to fight Paul's battle over again; and the Christian apologist must ever go back to Paul for his truest guidance and inspiration.

LECTURE IV

CHRISTIANITY AND HEATHENISM

THE progress of the Gentile mission imposed a new task on the Apologetic of the first century. Christianity was now brought into relation with a world of thought and culture to which its most elementary ideas were entirely foreign. It encountered forms of opposition which had never been contemplated in the teaching of Christ or of His primitive Apostles ; and in order to overcome them it was obliged, in great measure, to re-interpret its message. This conflict between the new religion and the different forces of Paganism was only beginning in the New Testament period ; but we already have clear indications of the course which it was to follow.

It was with the popular religion of the Gentile world that Paul and his fellow-apostles were chiefly thrown into collision ; and this had long since lost its hold on the more enlightened classes. Lucian, the representative writer of the succeeding age, treats the ancient beliefs with open ridicule. Cicero, a conservative mind of the previous century, contents himself with a guarded agnosticism : "that there are gods is certain, but we are ignorant of their nature." The various philosophical creeds, more particularly Stoicism with its practical discipline, had taken the place of religious belief in the minds of educated men. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the crude Paganism which Paul ascribes to the Gentile nations generally, was in any real sense dead. The masses of the people still retained a hardly diminished faith in the ancient gods ; and even the cultured classes, for all their assumed indifference, were steeped in the traditional beliefs to a far greater extent than they were aware. They took part

in the stated sacrifices and ceremonials ; they maintained the old observances in their domestic life,—deriding them, it might be, but still possessed with a superstitious sense of their efficacy. The philosophical systems which had apparently displaced religion were themselves impregnated with the essential ideas of the popular heathenism, and had largely taken over its language and mythology. Above all, the heathen beliefs, even when they seemed to be altogether discarded, had been embodied in the whole structure of the social organisation. Law, government, art, commerce, family and civic life, were all permeated with the heathen spirit. Paul did not exaggerate when he told his Corinthian readers, that if they would escape the contagion of idolatry they must needs go out of the world.

The New Testament criticism is directed not so much against any specific type of heathen belief as against heathenism, in its essential nature and spirit. Renan has complained, in a famous passage, that the Apostle Paul was

unable to make any distinction between the religion of the beautiful as it was practised at Athens, and gross idolatry. "Alas, fair gods and goddesses, true divinities, behold the man who has lifted the hammer against you ! The fatal words have gone forth, 'Ye are idols' ! The error of that ugly little Jew has sealed your doom." It may indeed be granted that the æsthetic sense was imperfectly developed in Paul. He included all the different forms of idolatrous worship, the refined and philosophical as well as the repulsive, under the same sweeping condemnation. And precisely for this reason his criticism has a permanent value. He was able to penetrate beneath the disguises and the changing modes of idolatry to the thing itself, and to analyse it in its ultimate essence.

Several of Paul's speeches in the book of Acts are addressed immediately to Pagan audiences ; and they can be authenticated and supplemented by many scattered allusions in

the Epistles. In 1st Thessalonians, more particularly, the Apostle directly indicates the line of argument which he was accustomed to follow when he sought to present his message to the heathen.

He dwelt, to begin with, on the folly of serving idols, which were made of wood or stone or metal by man's device, and could do nothing to help their worshippers. From this he passed to the true conception of God as it was set forth in Jewish monotheism. God was one, and as contrasted with the dumb idols He was the living God who had created all things and ruled them with His ever-active providence. The transition to distinctively Christian teaching was effected by a reference to the coming judgment. God, who required that all men should serve Him in righteousness, had appointed a day on which He would judge the world; and His assessor on this great day of doom would be Jesus Christ, who had departed from earth that He might come again in glory. Then followed some account of

Jesus, with peculiar emphasis laid on the fact of His resurrection. By that supreme act of divine power, He had established His claim to be God's messenger and representative. As such He demanded nothing more of men than that they should believe in Him, and consecrate themselves, in His name, to the service of the living God. On those who thus accepted Him He would bestow even now the earnest of His Spirit, and would be their Saviour in the judgment, which was close at hand.

This, in brief outline, was the missionary preaching of Paul, which was limited necessarily to the simplest truths, most of them familiar to the more enlightened Jews. But to convey even these elementary ideas was a matter of difficulty, owing to the absence of common presuppositions and a common religious language. In arguing with a Jewish audience, the missionaries could appeal directly to the scriptures and the generally accepted beliefs, but to Pagans the whole Christian position was strange. They had no concep-

tion of the oneness of God, of a Messiah, of a future resurrection. They attached to the simplest words in the Christian vocabulary a meaning which misrepresented the true one, or in any case fell short of it. They understood the moral virtues in a much more restricted sense than the Jew, while calling them by the same names. Our theology has been obscured and distorted to this very day by the failure of the Gentile mind to apprehend the merest elements of the Christian teaching.

The difficulty in finding a common meeting-ground was partially overcome by the use of words and ideas borrowed from philosophy. The higher thought of Paganism had of itself reached a position in some ways not dissimilar to that occupied by Jewish monotheism, and could be turned effectively against the popular beliefs. It is noticeable that in his speech at Athens Paul avails himself repeatedly of the current doctrines of Stoicism. He avoids the simple *θεός*, which to a Greek mind would have implied one god among many, and falls

back on the philosophical τὸ θεῖον. He makes use of the Stoical conceptions of the unity of the human race and of God's nearness to all men; and quotes from Cleanthes, the Stoic poet. It has to be remembered, certainly, that this speech was delivered at Athens; but Paul intended something more than to conciliate a more than usually cultivated audience. The philosophical language provided him, as the common language could not do, with forms of expression which were at least approximately true to his Christian thought.

There were broader grounds, however, on which Paul was able to base his appeal to heathen inquirers. He could point, in the first place, to the witness afforded by nature to the one living God. At Lystra he contrasted the dumb idols with the Power which manifests itself everywhere in the works of creation and providence. "God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are therein"; "who did not leave himself without a witness, in that he did good, and

gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons” (Acts xiv. 17). At Athens he dwells again on this witness to God in nature, and advances from it to the idea of a supreme invisible Lord, who is the source of all life and cannot be worshipped under any material form. In the first chapter of Romans this line of proof is developed to yet higher issues. The visible world is regarded as the actual revelation of God. From the contemplation of nature it is possible for a reflective mind to know Him in His eternal attributes of power, beneficence and wisdom.

But the Apostle chiefly rests on the inward witness, the deep-seated moral and religious instincts which are present in all men alike. Even with the worthless Felix he could reason of temperance, righteousness and judgment, knowing that he would awaken a response. The heathen had received no supernatural revelation, but they had a law written in their hearts—a moral sense whereby they were able to discern what was true and honourable and

lovely and of good report. Amidst their worst vices the conscience within them bore witness to God's will—"their thoughts all the while accusing or else excusing one another." It was this natural religious instinct which Paul took as his starting-point in his missionary preaching. What the Law had done for the Jews, conscience had done for the Gentiles. It had brought home to them the sense of guilt, and kept before them an ideal of righteousness, to which they could not attain by their own endeavours. The possession of it made them amenable to God's judgment no less than the Jews; and to them therefore the gospel of Christ offered itself with a direct significance, as the power of God unto salvation.

We have now to examine a little more in detail the criticism to which Paul subjects the Pagan religion as he found it in the world of his own day. He might seem to dismiss it scornfully, as a mere worship of dumb idols, false and unmeaning on the face of it; but

there are passages in his letters which prove that he had reflected on it closely and profoundly. As in the case of Judaism, he had sought to make clear to himself the fundamental error of this religious system, and so to contrast it with the truth as it was in Christ.

It is evident at the outset that the view of the heathen gods as "dumb idols" does not exhaust the whole thought of Paul. He indeed recognises that the idol in itself is "nothing at all in the world" except a graven image, and on this ground permits his converts to eat of meats which may have been offered in sacrifice. Yet, on the other hand, he allows a kind of reality to the idols. Nothing in themselves, they are nevertheless the symbols of spiritual beings which have an actual existence, not as gods, but as demons. To participate in an idolatrous feast knowingly and deliberately, is to incur a moral danger, since in doing so you hold fellowship with an evil spirit, as in the Lord's Supper you commune with Christ.

Paul's theory of the heathen gods forms part of a larger doctrine of which we have repeated traces in the Epistles. He conceives of this world as under the dominion of an evil agency—regarded sometimes as a single personal being, sometimes as a confederation of “principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness, wicked spirits in high places” (Eph. vi. 12). Salvation, to Paul's mind, is something more than a deliverance from sin. It is the rescue of men from a literal bondage in which their sin has involved them. Christ by His death has obtained the victory over the league of the powers of darkness, and those who were formerly captive are now set free.

Idolatry, therefore, is the outward sign of a deception which is practised on the ignorant world of heathendom. “Those things that the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God” (1 Cor. x. 20). “They are carried away unto dumb idols, even as they are enticed” (1 Cor. xii. 2). The evil powers have deluded the heathen into accepting them

as divinities, so that slavery to the prince of this world becomes a voluntary subjection. For this reason above all others, the Christians are to guard themselves against all participation in idolatry. An actual Power stands behind the idols, and makes use of them to deceive men and seduce them into his kingdom.

The heathen had fallen an easy prey to this deception, in consequence of their ignorance. God had not revealed Himself to them openly as to the Jews, and they had been left to grope after Him darkly, and, as it had proved, in vain. Heathenism, as Paul conceives it, is, in the first instance, ignorance : “the Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. iv. 17, 18). Christianity has brought with it a new capacity of knowledge. Those who were in darkness are now light in the Lord (Eph. v. 8). It is not merely that a new revelation has been imparted, but the original power of

knowledge, which had become obscured and buried, has now been restored. The inborn instinct for God is able to declare itself. The human mind can throw off the long accumulation of error and delusion, and return to its natural and reasonable service.

Heathenism is ignorance, and on this account God has borne with it so long in patience; yet the ignorance is not wholly involuntary. Paul, as we have seen, allows to all men a certain consciousness of God, apart from any definite revelation; and if the heathen have so utterly failed to find Him, the chief blame must lie with themselves. Their ignorance has its root in a perversion of the will, a moral blindness. This idea is developed most fully in the first chapter of Romans, which we require to consider more closely, as the deepest and most searching examination offered us in the New Testament, of the ultimate nature of heathenism.

Paul has set himself to prove that the

heathen, no less than the Jews, are inexcusable. They are themselves responsible for their error, and for the moral degradation in which it has involved them. He begins by proving that God by His works has manifested Himself so plainly that all men may recognise Him in His eternal power and divinity. The heathen had originally known Him through this natural revelation, but had denied Him His due honour, and had answered His goodness with ingratitude. Refusing in their pride and self-sufficiency to acknowledge God, they gradually lost the sense of Him. They became unable, in spite of all their wisdom, to distinguish between the creature and the Creator, and offered their worship to visible objects, images of men and birds and beasts. Their whole conception of the divine was thus perverted; and this primary falsehood affected all their thinking and their conduct. The elementary instincts and affections became corrupted. The distinctions of right and wrong, good and evil, were obliterated. Man's

whole life depends, in the last resort, on his conception of God, and when this is changed into a base and false conception, he is helpless. He has lost his sense of the true order of the universe, with the result that all his thoughts are thrown into confusion. His life on every side of it becomes diseased and unnatural.

This analysis rests on the assumption that in man there is a principle akin to the divine nature, in virtue of which God can be recognised and worshipped. It is an axiom in Paul's psychology that the *νοῦς*, the inward mind which is the core of man's being, is directed to God, although its will is rendered impotent by the will of the flesh. In the case of the Jews, this inward mind was still struggling to assert itself, but the heathen, puffed up with the sense of their own wisdom, had allowed it to grow paralysed. Spiritual beings, they had denied their higher affinities, and had offered their worship to the merely natural, putting the creature in place of the Creator. Not only was the true mind thus

rendered inoperative, but "since they cared not to retain God in their knowledge, He gave them over to a reprobate mind." The light that was in them changed into darkness; the divine principle was replaced by an active principle of evil, which wholly mastered them.

It may be objected to Paul's analysis that it is not in strict accordance with historical fact. Heathenism, as we are now aware, was not in its origin a rebellion against the sovereignty of God. It was not the corruption of a higher primitive faith, but the first stage in a religious development. Even Jewish monotheism was preceded by crude forms of nature-worship, which only gradually gave way to the ethical teaching of the great prophets. Paul's real object, however, is not to trace out the historical genesis of Pagan religion, but to determine its ultimate meaning and character. It had set the creature in the place of the Creator. It had failed to perceive that above the natural there is a spiritual

world, in relation to which man's life and destiny must be interpreted. The heathen were "without God in the world" (Eph. ii. 12); and through their blindness to the supreme reality, their life was reduced to a chaos, their feelings and thoughts and actions were hopelessly perverted. In its substance, Paul's criticism thus holds good, not merely in regard to heathen worship proper, but in regard to the naturalism which threatens ever and again to displace religion. Laplace, asked by Napoleon whether he allowed no room for God within his system, is said to have declared, "I do not find that I require any such hypothesis." Paul would answer that the world becomes simply unintelligible to those who will not retain God in their knowledge. Professing themselves to be wise, they are made foolish. Their error may not be demonstrable by reason, but it comes to light in the practical attempt to *live* as though there were no God above the natural forces. Such a life contains in it the principle of

dissolution. Leave out the spiritual and the natural will fall to pieces, being emptied of its inward meaning and reality.

The conception of heathenism as the worship of nature—of the creature instead of the Creator—determines the manner in which Paul presents Christianity over against it. Christ is the revelation of that higher order which men had lost sight of in their bondage to the elements of this world. He had come that He might effect the deliverance of men out of the merely natural order into the higher and spiritual. Already in the more earnest minds of heathendom there had sprung up a passionate longing for *redemption*. It was felt that the popular religion, rooted as it was in nature-worship, afforded no escape from the pressure of the outward mechanical forces; and this escape was sought through other agencies. The arts of magic flourished; the half-forgotten mysteries were revived; secret cults were introduced from Egypt and

the East. It was as the divine answer to this longing for Redemption that Paul presented his gospel.

1. In his preaching to the heathen he laid especial stress on the Resurrection, of which Christ had given assurance by His own rising from the dead. Within the limits of Pagan thought there was no room for any real belief in a future life. Philosophy, indeed, reasoning from the intrinsic nature of thought, maintained a doctrine of immortality; but it was an immortality of the bare thinking principle, set free from the impediments of sense, and man as an individual being could have no share in it. To the heathen mind, unable to conceive of anything beyond the visible and natural, there could be no true life after death. It was no accident that the men of Athens and the Roman Festus both interrupted Paul in derision at the point where he began to speak of a resurrection. Death, according to the heathen view, was man's inevitable and final destiny as a creature of nature; there

could be no passing beyond the set limit. Paul, however, took his stand on the fact that Christ had conquered death, and had thus broken through the natural forces at their very centre. His rising from the dead was the supreme proof that there is a higher world of freedom, into which all men through Him may have entrance. It is true that Paul clothes his belief in Jewish modes of thought, insisting that the body will have part in the coming resurrection, — changed though it will be into a spiritual body which will be the fit organ of the higher life. But the heart of the conception is that the immortality brought to light by Christ is a real and personal immortality. Not some abstract principle in man's being will vaguely continue after death, but man himself, in all the fulness of his activity, will rise again.

2. Paul holds that the redemption, which will hereafter be consummated, begins here and now. The believer, entangled as he is in the visible and material, participates already

in the higher spiritual order. He has his "citizenship in heaven" (Phil. iii. 20). Perhaps it was largely the endeavour to commend to the heathen mind this idea of a present redemption which led Paul to lay stress on the mystical import of the sacraments. A purely spiritual religion could not be made intelligible to the Greek world of that day. The Pagan required some palpable guarantee of the other life, some symbol to realise for him the breaking in of the supernatural on the natural order. Such a symbol was offered him in the Mysteries, which professed to ensure his redemption by means of sacred rites; and from Christianity he demanded something similar. Our religion from the outset possessed two simple ordinances, and these gradually assumed a new significance as the gospel made its way into the Gentile world. Baptism, originally a pure symbol, came to be regarded as in some sense the actual emergence from the old life into the new. The Lord's Supper was transformed from a memorial feast into

the mysterious act whereby the believer communed with Christ and received of His higher nature. Paul certainly, with his deep spiritual apprehension, was far from attaching a superstitious value to these sacraments. He is careful to lay emphasis on the inner realities which were symbolised, not on the symbols themselves. None the less, he so connected the rites with the spiritual ideas involved in them, that he prepared the way for the sacramentarianism of the following age. This tendency of his thought grew upon him, most probably, in the course of his work among the Gentiles. As a result of his constant endeavour to interpret the gospel to the Hellenic mind, he had fallen unconsciously into Hellenic modes of thinking. The simple Christian rites came to be invested in his mind with more than a symbolical purpose. They were possessed in some manner of a real efficacy, and were necessary means in the process of redemption.

3. Above all, the Apostle insists on the

higher morality which had now become possible through Christ. The bondage consequent on idolatry had made itself manifest in the hopeless corruption into which its victims had fallen. They were at the mercy of every base and sensual impulse, and had been given over to a reprobate mind, so that the will for better things was entirely wanting in them. Christianity had proved itself to be the religion of redemption by lifting men out of their impotence into a new and purer life. The Christian was not subject, like others, to the passions of the lower nature, but had found deliverance and come out into a world of moral freedom.

The later Apologists dwell repeatedly on the idea that the superior morality of the Christians is proof of the more rational character of their religion. To the ancient world, which had adopted the Socratic conception of virtue as knowledge, it was indeed significant that the humblest Christian was capable of a purity of life and a self-devotion

surpassing the example of the most famous sages. This could be urged as evidence of a profound rationality inherent in the Christian teaching, which was entitled therefore to rank as the true philosophy. In the Epistles of Paul we meet with many anticipations of this line of argument. The higher life which was the outcome of Christian faith, is connected with the wisdom, the light, the more perfect knowledge, revealed by Christ in His gospel. But Paul's more characteristic thought is that their purer morality bears witness to a new power now operative in believers. They have been released from subjection to "the elements of this world." Their virtues are proof to the Gentiles round about them that they have surrendered themselves to a redeeming power, which is of God.

The Christian life is therefore described emphatically as life in the Spirit—that is, in the power that belongs to the higher world, as opposed to the natural and material. It was one of Paul's supreme services to religion

that he informed the idea of the Spirit with an ethical content, identifying it with the divine influence which makes for love, patience, meekness, holiness. The true supernatural was thus discovered in simple Christian morality. There were several processes of thought by which Paul was led to this great conception, and one of them, we can well believe, was suggested by his controversy with the prevailing heathenism. The enthusiastic element which bulked so largely in early Christianity was equally present in many varieties of heathen worship. A stranger who entered by chance into a Christian meeting would see nothing in the speaking with tongues and other spiritual manifestations which could prove to him that this religion was of higher origin. He perceived only the "madness," the religious frenzy, which was a recognised feature in many outlandish cults of the day. Paul claimed that the Spirit which gave rise to the abnormal phenomena in the church was at the same

time the motive power to a higher life. That was its distinctive character, by which it proved itself to have come forth from another world. He impresses on his converts that they are so to live as to give evidence to their heathen neighbours of their possession of this Spirit.

Christianity, however, was to demonstrate its higher origin not only by the conduct of individual believers, but by the activity of the church as a whole. Within the New Testament itself we can trace the development of the idea of the church as a mystical community; and this idea derived its chief impulse from the Gentile mission. The gospel was preached in a world which was radically hostile to it, and which, according to primitive Christian belief, was subject to the dominion of an evil power. Those, therefore, whom Christ had emancipated had, in a literal sense, entered on a new life. They belonged to a different kingdom from the surrounding mass of heathenism. They had

identified themselves with the heavenly order, with the world of light as opposed to that of darkness. The church, accordingly, was the holy community, the "Temple of the living God" (2 Cor. vi. 16). It was a society different from all others, inasmuch as it stood for the spiritual order and was entirely separate from the world.

The church is thus regarded as bearing witness against the present organisation, in which the principles and ideas of heathen nature-worship have found their embodiment. It might seem, indeed, on a superficial view, that the New Testament attitude to the state is one of friendliness. The book of Acts, in one of its salient aspects, is a political apologetic, and seeks to make out that Christianity from the beginning had been regarded favourably by the Roman authorities, as a force working for the good of the empire. Again and again Paul enjoins obedience to the constituted powers and a conciliatory behaviour

towards Pagan society. Even in a later writing such as 1st Peter, dating from the period of persecution, the duty of good citizenship is sedulously enforced. But beneath this formal compliance with the regulations of the heathen state it is never forgotten that the church is separate—a kingdom by itself. It accepts the present order in a spirit of patient acquiescence, but is waiting all the time for the new order, which will commence with the Lord's return from heaven. Within the church itself this reign of Christ has commenced already. The Christians are strangers (1 Pet. i. 1) who must needs submit to the laws of the foreign country, but who cannot forget that their true citizenship is in heaven.

The New Testament knows nothing of our modern conception of a church that is in active sympathy with the state and that aims at impregnating it with the Christian spirit. The church of the primitive time asked only to be left alone, unmolested in its pursuit of the higher life. It did not rebel against the

existing order, neither did it feel itself called upon to elevate and Christianise it. The two spheres of the church and the world were wholly apart, and had nothing to do with one another. It is not surprising that almost from its first appearance Christianity was regarded with suspicion, as a secret organisation, inimical to the state. The cry of the mob at Thessalonica, "These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus," expressed a view which was adopted before long by the Roman Government; and while in one sense it was unjust to the Christians, who were careful to avoid any offence against the laws, it possessed a real justification. The members of the church never ceased to feel that they were subject to another king, to whom alone they owed true allegiance. They were aliens in the earthly kingdom, only tolerating its behests and ordinances until their own Lord should appear.

It is impossible to overlook this aspect of

early Christianity, or to maintain, as some have done, that the church from the first contemplated an alliance with the empire. The one aim of which we have evidence was the formation of a wholly separate community, in which the children of God should be gathered by themselves out of the world. At the same time, the antagonism was not to human government as such. There is no ground in the New Testament for the strange contention of Tolstoy, that Christianity in its essence is purely individual and anarchical, and must always oppose itself to every form of state authority. Paul recognises that God is not the God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. xiv. 33); and allows that all government, in so far as it ensures justice and social well-being, is of God. He laboured himself for the organising of the new community, for he perceived that only on this condition it would be able to fulfil its higher work. It was not with the state that the church found itself at variance, but with the heathen state, based as it was on

ideals and presuppositions that were radically alien to the gospel of Christ. The fundamental error which Paul discerned in heathenism—worship of the creature instead of the Creator—had embodied itself, under many variations, in the whole structure of society. The state existed solely for earthly and material ends, and denied the very possibility of any others. It gave true expression to its inward character when it finally established Cæsar-worship as the official religion, declaring thereby that the supreme human power was absolutely supreme. There was no higher will realising itself on earth, no invisible spiritual order. The world was wholly subject to the creature, who was to be worshipped henceforth without disguise.

The church, therefore, was not merely a Christianising agency within the state, but was the direct antithesis to the state. It stood over against the world, and was pervaded with a spirit which was different in kind from that

of heathendom. Paul lays emphasis, more especially, on two broad facts which illustrated the nature of the opposition between the church and the secular society. (1) The Christians were bound to one another in a relation of mutual love and helpfulness; while the apparent union within the heathen state was only effected by an outward compulsion. Idolatry had its most characteristic outcome in "covetousness" (*πλεονεξία*),—in the self-aggrandisement which set every man's hand against his neighbour. The fruit of the Spirit was love, and the church proved itself to be a spiritual community by resting its whole organisation on the one law of brotherly love. (2) Its contrast to the heathen society was marked, even more conspicuously, by the abolition within it of all racial and class divisions. In the new community there was neither Greek nor Jew, bond nor free. The gospel of Christ had brought with it a new estimate of human personality, and men were able to realise henceforth that they were spiritual beings

and equal before God. Paul has often been reproached for offering no protest against the system of slavery, as it existed, under its darkest aspects, in the world of his time. We must remember, however, that slavery was only one element in the social and political system which he recognised as totally corrupt and now ripe for destruction. His object was not to amend that system, but to build up within it an entirely new community, governed by the Spirit of Christ. The divisions and inequalities which belonged inevitably to the world's order were already done away in the Christian church.

To sum up—the attitude of Paul to the state is part of his general attitude to Paganism; and we involve ourselves in all manner of contradictions when we seek to interpret his principles as valid for our civic life to-day. The state of which he wrote was the visible counterpart of the false ideals of heathen worship. It was the earthly representative of the kingdom of darkness, out of which the

Christian converts had been delivered; and while they passively accepted it, they were to unite themselves into a new brotherhood, separate from the world. The view of heathenism of which this attitude to the state was the necessary consequence, was doubtless marked by grave limitations. Paul judges the alien religions from the position of strict Jewish monotheism, and his estimate of them is lacking in breadth and sympathy. He makes no allowance for the elements of good that were mingled with the error, for the higher thoughts and aspirations which had only found an imperfect utterance. Comparing Christianity with Paganism he saw nothing but an unqualified contrast of light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, life and death. When we apply it literally to any form of heathen religion, Paul's criticism is inadequate and unjust; but none the less we cannot but recognise the truth at the heart of it. The heathen spirit, which refuses to know the invisible things by the things that are made, is

always the same, under many different manifestations. It was this spirit which Paul condemned with unequalled power and insight, and his words have still their meaning and their warning for our world to-day.

LECTURE V

CHRISTIANITY AND Gnosticism

THE struggle with Gnosticism in the latter part of the second century was fraught with momentous consequences. In its endeavour to overthrow the great heresy, the church was compelled to re-examine its own position. It learned to secure its authentic message by the fixing of the New Testament canon, by the formulation of a creed, by the establishment of a settled order of government and worship. The Gnostic controversy was thus the determining factor in the creation of an imperial church out of the loosely organised communities of the Apostolic Age.

The struggle is commonly associated with the second century, in which the cleavage

between the orthodox and the heretical teaching widened out to its full limits. But there can be little doubt that the wave which culminated in the great Gnostic systems had long been gathering. Within the New Testament itself we have clear evidence of the beginnings of the new movement, and of the anxiety with which it was regarded by the leaders of the church. The later New Testament writings are hardly intelligible, unless we set them against the background of the rising heresy which had begun to overshadow the original tradition. In some respects the Gnostic controversy can be studied to more advantage in the New Testament than in the polemical works of the subsequent period. The fundamental ideas of Gnosticism were in course of time largely submerged under the fantastic mythologies; while the single heresy divided itself into a multitude of separate types, often with little more than a vague family resemblance to one another. The later Gnosticism, moreover, diverged so

widely from the original Christian position, that it became for all practical purposes a different religion. In the New Testament, on the other hand, Gnosticism is still a movement within Christianity itself. It comes before us in its barest and simplest form, so that the characteristic ideas which were afterwards obscured and overlaid are distinctly traceable. We are able to recognise it as an ever-recurring tendency of religious thought, not merely as a wild aberration, which was only possible at a given time, under peculiar historical conditions.

The problem of the origin of Gnosticism is an exceedingly complicated one, and the deeper investigations which may eventually solve it are still in their initial stages. But while much remains obscure we can single out, with a fair degree of certainty, the main factors which contributed to the movement. There was first the invasion of the Roman world of the early empire by a multitude of

Oriental beliefs—Persian, Indian, Egyptian, Babylonian. None of these alien religions had enough of individual character to maintain itself apart, and fragments of all of them became fused together in an indefinite theosophy. This, in turn, was pressed into the service of the speculative thought of the age. Greek philosophy, ever since the days of Plato, had sought to express its profounder ideas with the aid of myth; and this tendency became more and more pronounced as the demand was made on philosophy to supply the place of religion. The philosophical doctrines themselves could offer no appeal to feeling or imagination; but they were clothed in the Eastern mythologies, which were admirably fitted, by their cloudy fantastic nature, to give embodiment to abstract ideas. In its beginning, therefore, Gnosticism had no specific connection with Christianity. It was the product of forces which belonged to the general atmosphere of the time, and would have manifested itself in some fashion, even

though Christianity had never been. The age had outgrown the popular religion, which was based on nature-worship and could hold out no promise of deliverance from the earthly bondage. It sought, with the materials it possessed, in Eastern myth and Greek philosophy, to mould a new religion, adequate to its higher needs and aspirations.

There were several reasons why this movement, at first independent, came to ally itself ever more definitely with Christianity. In the first place, it gave a welcome to all the prevailing types of Eastern belief, and had already absorbed many of the ideas of Judaism, especially of Philonic and Apocalyptic Judaism. The door was thus opened for the entrance of Christianity. Received at first as one of the many Eastern faiths, the new religion soon asserted its superiority, and became the nucleus around which the others were gathered. Again, Christianity made its appeal to the very need which the eclectic movement was seeking to satisfy. The evils

of the time, the growing sense of despair which had fallen on the Pagan world, had awakened in men everywhere the longing for Redemption. They turned to the ancient Mysteries, to the cult of Mithra, to any wild superstition that seemed to promise an escape from the tyranny of the earthly forces. Christianity claimed to be the religion of Redemption; and its watchwords, imperfectly understood, were taken up by the new movement. The gospel was accepted, not in its purity, but as the chief element in what seemed a larger and more comprehensive faith. Once more, it needs to be admitted that the Christian teachers themselves were partly responsible for the alliance with Gnosticism. In the attempt to render their message intelligible to the Hellenic world, they were led to place emphasis on much that was foreign to its real nature. Paul himself repeatedly speaks of the gospel as a higher sort of knowledge. He brings it into relation with cosmological ideas. He invests it with the character of a Mystery,

and distinguishes between the several grades of initiation. It may even be inferred from his own account of his teaching (1 Cor. ii.) that he communicated to his more advanced disciples an esoteric doctrine which is not fully represented in his writings. This doctrine, we may be sure, was only the mystical expression of genuine Christian ideas ; but it passed as an under-current into the common theology, and hastened the development towards Gnosticism.

In all these ways the attempt to construe a new eclectic religion came to associate itself definitely with Christianity. From a very early time the dangerous tendency of the movement was suspected. Paul recognises that at Corinth the speculative side of his teaching has been exaggerated, almost to the suppression of those elements in it which belonged to its essence. If the Epistle to the Colossians is to be accepted as a first-hand work of Paul, his opinions towards the close of his life became even more decided. None

the less, during the New Testament period there was no formal severance between the alien doctrine and the orthodox faith. The heretics were not a hostile sect as in the subsequent age, but were simply the advanced wing of the church itself, and participated in the common worship and enterprise. Their teaching is discussed and condemned, often in no measured terms, but always as an acknowledged type of professed Christian doctrine.

There is one direct allusion (1 Tim. vi. 20) to “*γνῶσις* falsely so called”; and from this we can infer that the movement was already beginning to assume the name by which it is known to history. Elsewhere the reference is a general one to “false teachings”; but we can hardly doubt, from the accounts given of them, that these were stamped with a Gnostic character. The “false teachings” are mentioned, more or less expressly, in Acts, Revelation, and the Epistle to the Ephesians. The conflict with them is the ruling motive in Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, the first and second Epistles

of John, the Epistles of Jude and 2nd Peter. Such prominence is given to the issue in the Johannine Epistles that we are led to suspect its presence likewise in the Fourth Gospel; and this suspicion grows almost to a certainty as we examine the gospel more attentively. The attitude of the evangelist, however, is a peculiar one, and will presently require some investigation.

The writings enumerated were the works of different thinkers, and appeared in different places at dates considerably apart; and we have to allow, therefore, for a certain variety in the descriptions they offer of the false teachings. For example, in Colossians we have to deal with a heresy which was ascetic in its tendency, and strongly marked with Jewish influences. The Epistles of John, written perhaps a generation later, contemplate a type of thought which would resolve Christianity into a philosophical idealism. But from all the accounts, various as they are, we gather a single impression. The heresies combated

in the New Testament may all be grouped under the name of Gnosticism—understanding by this the incipient form of the movement which was to have its final outcome in the great systems of the second century. It will be well at the beginning to mark the chief features of this earlier Gnosticism, as they may be inferred with sufficient clearness, from the scattered allusions in the New Testament.

1. An emphasis was laid on *knowledge* as the central factor in the religious life. From this one-sided intellectualism the whole movement derived its name. It subordinated moral activity to that *knowledge* of the truth which was held to be the grand condition of salvation.

2. The necessary consequence of this insistence on knowledge was the distinguishing of two classes of men, the spiritual natures who were capable of the higher wisdom, and the inferior, psychical natures. Jude in his invective against the false teachers, makes pointed reference to this assumed distinction.

They themselves, he declares, in their arrogant aloofness from their brethren, are the unspiritual men, *ψυχικοὶ, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες*.

3. The higher, super-sensible world was opposed to the lower and material; and Redemption consisted in the passing out of the world of darkness into the world of light. This doctrine was shared in, to some extent, by the orthodox church, which informed it, however, with ethical ideas. In Gnosticism darkness and light were contrasted simply as two kinds of being,—the material and the spiritual.

4. The separation thus made had its practical outcome in a morbid attitude towards the bodily life. The spiritual man either regarded the life of sense as wholly evil, and sought as far as might be to repress it, or he exulted in his liberty as a citizen of the higher world, and indulged his natural appetites without restraint. Both of these tendencies are represented in the earlier, as they were in the later forms of Gnosticism.

5. The doctrine of the Person of Christ

was interpreted in a docetic sense. This was required, on the one hand, by the opposition which was assumed between the material and spiritual worlds. The Son of God, descending from heaven to accomplish man's deliverance, could enter into no real contact with earthly things; and His appearance in the flesh, His suffering and death, were of the nature of an illusion. On the other hand, the docetic view was involved in the cosmical interpretation of Christianity. The earthly history of Jesus required to be sublimated into a sort of allegory of the universal redemptive process. He Himself became an ideal figure, His life a symbol of the eternal conflict between the worlds of light and darkness.

6. A place was given to a multitude of intermediate divine beings. There were "endless genealogies" (1 Tim. i. 4; Tit. iii. 9), hierarchies of æons and archons, as in the later systems. Christ was only the centre of a host of angelic powers, all of whom were entitled to a certain measure of adoration.

7. The Resurrection was believed to have come already. In view of the radical opposition of matter and spirit, it was impossible to accept the doctrine of a literal resurrection. The traditional belief was explained, apparently, in a symbolic sense. Those who were "spiritual" had already risen from the dead and entered into the higher life.

8. The new teaching, even in this earlier stage, possessed a mysterious vocabulary in which its teachings were communicated. "Great swelling words of vanity" (Jude 16) were gathered together out of many outlandish faiths, and were supposed to convey some profound meaning. The cardinal terms of the later Gnosticism, *πλήρωμα*, *αἰών*, *ἄρχων*, *σοφία*, *βυθός*, light and darkness, pneumatic and psychic, were also current, although their technical sense had not altogether supplanted their more literal one.

From this survey of the leading characteristics of the false teaching, we see at once

that it contained much that was fantastic and extravagant. The higher faith had been thrown into combination with pre-existing beliefs, and the result was a wild mythology. Nevertheless it is only just to acknowledge that certain genuine religious ideas were struggling to assert themselves amidst the extravagances. There was, first, a recognition of the higher nature in man, who belonged essentially to another world, although he found himself at the mercy of the material forces. The contrast of body and spirit, earthly and heavenly, was no doubt set forth one-sidedly ; but this was inevitable in the reaction from Pagan naturalism. If the spiritual world was to be conceived as a reality, it had to be separated altogether from the world of nature, which had hitherto been all in all. Again, Gnosticism was an endeavour to correlate Christianity with the order of the universe as a whole ; and in this respect it aimed at satisfying a genuine need. The Greek intellect was unable to rest in

anything short of an ultimate principle. If the Christian revelation was true, then it must possess a universal significance; it was bound up with the very constitution of the world, and all knowledge must be reconstructed in the light of it. Hence the transformation, to our mind so repellent, of the simple Christian teaching into a vast cosmology in which science, philosophy and religion were all mingled together. Once more, it was with the help of Gnosticism that the Christian message was partially disentangled from the Jewish eschatological forms in which it was originally given. Even Paul, with his profound spiritual insight, could not conceive of salvation, judgment, eternal life, except as realities of the future world; while Gnosticism, even when it employed the traditional imagery, sought to penetrate to the inward truth conveyed by it. The return of Christ was identified, not with a historical event in the future, but with the abiding presence of the invisible Lord. The Resurrec-

tion was something else than the re-animation of the body at the last day. It had happened already in the spiritual change by which the soul was set free and awakened to the higher life. Even the docetism of the Gnostic teaching was connected with this effort to apprehend the deeper truth which had hitherto been expressed in symbol. The life of Christ was dissociated from all that appeared to be merely contingent. Faith was directed to the eternal Christ, who remained ever the same amidst the changes of this passing world.

The value of many of the Gnostic ideas was tacitly acknowledged by the early church itself. They were seen to be not so much in conflict with the essential teaching of Christianity, as to serve its legitimate development and interpretation. Of this partial acceptance of Gnostic thinking we have traces in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and, to a still greater extent, in the Fourth Gospel. The relation of the Fourth Evangelist to Gnosticism is

indeed very difficult to determine. That he wrote under the shadow of the growing heresy is practically certain from the many striking allusions to Gnostic modes of thought; and it can hardly be doubted that his attitude is, in the main, polemical. This would seem evident from his fundamental thesis that the Word had been truly manifest in the flesh. He goes back from the vagaries of Gnostic idealism to the historical life of Christ, and offers his reply, from many different sides, to those who had called it in question. In like manner the ethical teaching of the gospel seems to be deliberately opposed to the Gnostic over-estimate of knowledge. They who do the will of God know the doctrine (vii. 17); love to Christ has its outcome in obedience to His commandments (xiv. 23); humility and mutual service are the true marks of Christian discipleship (xiii. 14, 33, 34). But interwoven with this strain of polemic we can discern another strain, hardly less conspicuous, of sympathy with the Gnostic

teaching. The opposition of the two worlds of light and darkness is accepted, and affords the explanation of the whole redemptive process. The Resurrection is held to have come already, in so far as the transition from death to life takes place in the present, through the act of belief in Christ. The historical fact of Jesus is read by the light of the ideal value which He possesses for faith. In His life on earth He was still the Eternal Christ, and all His recorded actions are to be viewed symbolically, as fore-shadowing His larger work. Without a fuller knowledge than we possess of the origin and purpose of the gospel it is impossible to account for this two-fold attitude to Gnostic doctrine, but though obscure it is not altogether unintelligible. We can believe that the evangelist had been powerfully attracted by certain aspects of the new teaching, while he rejected its ultimate conclusions. The more because he perceived that Gnosticism as a whole could not be reconciled with Christian truth, he was anxious

to assimilate from it whatever it contained of enduring value. His position might be compared to that of a broad-minded Protestant who is utterly opposed to the underlying doctrines of Romanism, and yet finds himself in sympathy with many of its ideas, and would gladly appropriate them for the enrichment of his own faith. At a later period, when the opposition to Gnosticism had become acute, no approximation to the heretical beliefs was possible on the part of an orthodox thinker. But the gospel was written at a time when the alien teaching was still recognised by the church, although with growing suspicion; and a method like that of the evangelist was more likely than any other to neutralise it. It would be less dangerous when the valuable elements were taken over from it and allowed their due place in the accepted Christian belief.

We have now to consider the answer to Gnostic error which is furnished by the

writers of the New Testament. That there was a kernel of truth in the heresy is undeniable; and this is granted, as we have seen, by the profound thinker to whom we owe the Fourth Gospel. But it was perceived, almost from the outset, that the movement in its ultimate tendency was subversive of Christianity. In the New Testament we do not indeed meet with a reasoned exposure of Gnosticism, such as was attempted in a later age by Irenæus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian. The writers content themselves for the most part with indicating the cardinal errors of the system, and with reasserting, over against them, the authentic Christian doctrines. But their criticism, slight as it is, evinces a far truer insight into the real danger than the prolix arguments of the later Apologists. It possesses, moreover, a permanent value, since it is concerned with the radical ideas of Gnosticism rather than with its temporary, accidental forms.

The false teaching is condemned, in the

first place, because of its practical consequences in the lives of its adherents. They are lovers of their own selves, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy (2 Tim. iii. 2, 3). They profess that they know God, but in their works deny Him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate (Tit. i. 16). These charges are repeated, with a few additions, in all the polemical Epistles, and one is tempted to regard them with a not unnatural suspicion. It has been the unfortunate habit of controversialists in every age to attack the moral character of their opponents; theologians, more especially, have been apt to take for granted that bad opinions and a bad life must go together. We have to remark, however, that the charges of loose living preferred against the Gnostic teachers are occasionally varied with the opposite charge of asceticism. They forbid to marry, observe strict rules concerning meats and drinks, hold to such maxims as "touch not, taste

not, handle not" (Col. ii. 21). Their doctrine led, not necessarily to a vicious, but to a false and morbid attitude towards the material life. As against this attitude the true Christian principle is laid down that "every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. iv. 4). The physical life is assigned its due place as right and necessary, so long as it is made instrumental to the higher activity.

But apart from immorality in the narrow sense, the heretics are accused of pride and selfishness; and these charges were undoubtedly well grounded, and pointed to the radical defect of their teaching. Gnosticism claimed to be a religion for an intellectual élite. Only a few were gifted with the intelligence which could respond to the new teaching, and this superiority of intelligence was taken as the mark of a difference of nature. The weaker brethren were regarded almost as another species; they were the "psychical men" who belonged to a lower

grade of spirits, and who could look, at the most, for only a partial salvation. It was this contempt of others, engendered by the pride of knowledge, which opened Paul's eyes to the dangerous character of the movement at Corinth; and the later writers continue to dwell upon it, as the surest condemnation of the heresy. No belief could claim to be in any real sense Christian, if its practical results were so manifestly opposed to the Christian spirit.

The New Testament writers attack not only the pride of the Gnostics, but the assumptions on which it based itself. Christianity, according to the false teachers, was intended primarily for an elect class. The ordinary "psychical" believer was not altogether excluded; but he could aspire to nothing more than an imperfect knowledge, insufficient to procure him the larger blessing which was reserved for the "spiritual," fully enlightened man. This error is refuted by bringing into strong relief the universal

character of the salvation which had been purchased by Christ. "God will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4). "There is one Mediator, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. ii. 6). "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. ii. 2). Paul had already proclaimed the universality of the gospel as against Jewish exclusiveness; and his message assumed a new meaning in view of the Gnostic doctrine. If Christ died for all, then His message must appeal to something which was common to all men; not merely to that higher intelligence which belongs to the few.

We come, therefore, to the New Testament criticism of the doctrine that salvation is dependent on *knowledge*. There are two main lines of reply to this fundamental assumption of Gnosticism.

1. In the first place, the validity of that

type of knowledge on which the Gnostic claim was based is called in question. It is "knowledge falsely so called" (1 Tim. vi. 20), dealing with pretended mysteries which have nothing to do with the essential Christian message. The church is reminded that in the doctrine handed down to it by the Apostles it possesses the true wisdom, through which the spurious *γνῶσις* would eventually be overcome. It must be granted that this line of argument was beset with danger, and partly admitted the truth of the Gnostic position. In the endeavour to commend Christianity to the world of Hellenic culture the gospel had been represented as a higher sort of knowledge. This conception, as we have seen, was itself one of the chief factors in the rise of Gnosticism, but an effort was still made to preserve it. The traditional faith was contrasted with the heresy as true knowledge with false. It was true, first, because it dealt with realities and not with mere dreams and conjectures. "*We* have not

followed cunningly devised fables," says the author of 2nd Peter (i. 16); and he proceeds to rest his appeal on actual Apostolic experience. The writer to the Ephesians dwells continually on the thought that the gospel is a "mystery," hidden from the beginning in God, though now proclaimed to all men. Its mystery, however, does not consist in sham profundities, like those of the Gnostic teaching, but in the simple verities of God's love to the world and His revelation in Christ. Again, much is made of the *catholicity* of the true Christian knowledge. It is open to all, not whispered in a corner to one narrow sect or school. "I spake openly to the world," says Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, "and in secret have I taught nothing" (xviii. 20). So in the magnificent passage of Ephesians, "to comprehend *with all saints* what is the length and breadth and height" (iii. 18), the idea of catholicity is emphatic. The writer would imply that the grandest and most satisfying knowledge cannot, by its very nature, be an

exclusive possession, but must be shared alike by all. Once more, the Christian knowledge, as opposed to that of the Gnostics, is shown to be something more than a mere intellectual thing. It runs back to faith, and cannot be perfected except in a pure and holy life. By their contempt of moral obligations the heretics had destroyed their capacity for the higher knowledge, which must always be ethically conditioned. The Fourth Gospel, more particularly, enforces this wider conception of religious knowledge (vii. 17 ; xvii. 3).

2. But there is another and more characteristic line of argument along which the Gnostic position is combated. The emphasis is removed from knowledge altogether, and is placed on the purely ethical and religious activities ; these, and these only, belong to the substance of the Christian life. Thus in the Pastoral Epistles the ascetic and speculative doctrines of Gnosticism are set aside, and the demand is made for a practical obedience. In Colossians and Ephesians the same thought

is worked out to its profounder issues. Love is the root and ground—the central energy—of the religious life ; and by possessing in himself the spirit of love, the believer becomes responsive to the message of Christ. The new teaching, with its philosophy and vain deceit, is “according to the rudiments of this world” (Col. ii. 8) ; that is, in spite of its pretending to a higher wisdom, it is a sinking back into lower material conceptions. Very noticeable in these two Epistles are the pointed allusions to Gnostic watchwords : “that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. iii. 19) ; “in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. ii. 3). We are made to realise that everything sought for in the doctrine of the Pleroma is given in Christ, and that to hold fellowship with Him is to participate in the divine life. The Epistle of John, even more emphatically, puts love in the place of knowledge. “He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He

that loveth his brother abideth in the light. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (ii. 9, 10; ii. 4). The whole Epistle is like an amplification of our Lord's own saying, "I thank Thee, Father, that these things are hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes." Not by knowledge do men reach out to God and the eternal life, but by having in themselves the childlike spirit of trust and love.

The controversy with the false teachers centred in the question of the Person of Christ. Gnosticism, when it sought to construe Christianity as a speculative system, had adopted a peculiar, and in some ways magnificent, conception of the Saviour's life and work. The man Jesus, according to this conception, was united with an Aeon which had come forth directly out of the supernal world; and the work accomplished by Him was only one phase of a vast cosmic process

by which the divine element, submerged in the universe of matter, was rescued and gathered up again into the Pleroma. But the church discerned, with a true instinct, that the whole meaning of the revelation in Christ was thus obscured, and that a lower instead of a higher value was assigned to His Person. It was assumed, for one thing, that His life in the flesh was an unreal appearance. The divine Aeon had only a passing identity with the man Jesus, and did not share in His sufferings and death. But apart from this, His supreme significance was impaired by the explanation of His work as only an aspect of a cosmical process. He became one of many divine powers by which the redeeming purpose of God was mediated, and faith could no longer be certain that in Him it apprehended the Saviour, whose help was all-sufficient.

The chief object of the Epistles to Colossians and Ephesians is to assert the unique dignity and absolute saving power of Christ. He is

not merely one of the Aeons which make up the Pleroma, but in Him dwells bodily, *i.e.* in real and personal form, all the fulness of the Godhead. He fills all in all, is far above all principality and power, and every name that is named in this world or in that to come. All things are "summed up" in Him, and the faith which holds fast to Him possesses all. Colossians, like the sister Epistle, asserts the completeness of the redemptive work of Christ. By His death all things both in heaven and earth were reconciled to God; and since the angelic powers were themselves included in the reconciliation, they could not be worshipped as on an equality with Him. Faith in Christ united the believer directly with the Head, and the intermediate agencies of Gnosticism, therefore, became superfluous. In subjecting himself to them the Christian suffered a degradation. He refused the liberty, the deliverance from all the lower powers of this world, which had been secured for him once for all through the Cross.

The Epistles of John are concerned particularly with the docetic errors of the false teachers. They had sought, in the interests of what seemed a higher idealism, to dis sever the redeeming work of Christ from His earthly life. It was not the man Jesus who was the Son of God, but the Aeon which had been for a little while united with Him. The historical life was either that of a man like others, or a phantasmal life, which only appeared to have a bodily reality. Against this teaching John insists on the literal fact of the gospel history, and makes the confession of it the grand criterion of genuine Christian belief. To deny the actuality of the life of Jesus is to empty Christianity of its whole ethical and religious content. The love of God was manifested precisely in this—that He made His Son the partaker of our human lot; and the love of God thus revealed in Christ is the spring and motive of love in us. By love, not by knowledge, we lay hold on the life of God; and Jesus Christ,

by His divine self-sacrifice, has awakened in us this love. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God" (1 Jn. iv. 15).

It was probably the same need of re-asserting the historical fact of the life of Jesus which was the immediate occasion of the writing of the Fourth Gospel. The evangelist recognised the half truth in the Gnostic contention that Jesus, to be the Mediator of life, must possess an ideal, as well as a historical significance; but he discovers the ideal value in the earthly life itself. The invisible Christ who is ever present with His people, is yet one with Jesus, who was manifest once in a given place and time. Through His life then we know what He is still; we are able to discern Him as He comes to us in the inward experience of faith. The teaching of the gospel is partly obscured by certain ideas of a philosophical nature which are absent from the Epistle. The significance of the life of Jesus is sought, not so much in its exhibition

of the love of God as in its manifestation, under forms of sense, of the eternal Logos. But the central thought is the same as in the Epistle,—that to avail for men the divine life must have been a real and human life. The Word could be nothing to us unless it was indeed made flesh.

The Gnostic speculations had thus the effect of throwing the church back on its original tradition, and compelling it to realise the abiding value of the historical revelation in Jesus. It was partly a tendency in Christianity itself which had led to the heretical distortion of the primitive gospel. Paul had declared that he refused henceforth to know Christ after the flesh ; he could regard the earthly life as only an interlude between two phases of heavenly existence. The Gnostics, by their exaggeration of this attitude, made it evident that apart from the life of Jesus Christianity was meaningless. It was cut off from the sources of its power and became a mere speculation, futile and unreal. A return

accordingly set in towards the simple facts on which the religion was founded. The history was re-examined, with the deeper insight which had come through Christian experience, and was found to be of eternal value. Jesus Himself, in His love and holiness and self-sacrifice, was the supreme revelation of God.

The ultimate victory of the church in the long conflict with Gnosticism was not won without grievous loss. Christian dogma was unduly hardened and narrowed in the endeavour to set it free from alien elements. The activity of the living Spirit was subordinated to an orthodox rule of faith, and this was safeguarded by the building up of the church as an outward institution. Already in the later books of the New Testament we have evidence of this progress towards a more external conception of Christianity. But the victory of the church, at whatever cost, was necessary to the very life of our religion. It has been described as the victory of sober reason

over wild irresponsible speculation ; but it was much more. It ensured that Christianity should continue as an ethical religion, appealing to all mankind, and not as an esoteric philosophy. It ensured also that through all its future developments the church should be anchored to its historical origins in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

At best, however, the victory was an imperfect one. Gnosticism had only pressed to an extreme those speculative modes of thought which the orthodox faith had itself adopted in its effort to win over the Hellenic world. In Greek philosophy it had found a powerful ally against the forces of Jewish and heathen unbelief ; but the alliance between Christianity and philosophical idealism is never without its danger. One side of Christian truth may be temporarily defended by such aid ; but the categories of philosophy are by their nature inadequate to embody the purely religious ideas, which are bound up, in the last resort, with the intuition of faith. The Gnostic tradi-

tion, overcome in its more pronounced forms, was carried on by Origen and the Greek Fathers—even by those who claimed to oppose it,—and obtained fixity in the creeds and symbols of the great Councils. A speculative element was introduced into Christianity, which we have to acknowledge as foreign to its intrinsic character.

The primitive reply to Gnosticism is still valid as against all attempts which are made from time to time to resolve our religion into a philosophical system. It is true for ever, as the New Testament has taught us, that the highest knowledge is one with simple faith; that God reveals Himself not to the wise and prudent, but to the pure of heart. The life of Jesus, as it stands before us in the Gospels, is the true mystery. Gnosticism was the first of many systems which have disdained the simplicity of our faith, and have sought, with the help of abstruse speculation, to invest it with new meaning and grandeur. But these systems all in their turn prove empty and

unsatisfying. We return to the old commandment which we had from the beginning—to the simple message of Jesus Christ proclaimed in His life and His Cross. “In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

LECTURE VI

CHRISTIANITY AS THE ABSOLUTE RELIGION

IN the progress of the Gentile mission the church attained to an ever clearer sense of its world-wide vocation. Men of the most diverse classes and nationalities had all alike responded to the new teaching, and had found a satisfaction in it for their religious needs. Paul, towards the close of his ministry, is able to declare proudly that the gospel has now been preached to the whole world (Col. i. 23). The church, it is true, was only established in a few centres, and embraced, at the most, several thousands of adherents; but these were representative of the human race in all its main divisions. The experiment for which Paul himself was chiefly answerable had

succeeded. Christianity had advanced its claim to be a religion for all mankind, and all mankind had now potentially accepted it.

This sense of the universal mission of Christianity was accompanied with a growing assurance of its intrinsic truth and value. The gospel which had been proclaimed originally to a little circle of Jewish believers, had won converts among all the nations. Wherever it went it had proved itself the power of God unto salvation. The church was no longer content to defend its faith as against Judaism or Paganism, or even the higher forms of philosophical speculation; for its superiority was felt to be not a merely relative one. The Christian message was nothing less than the Truth itself, and would be valid for all time, as it was for all the different peoples of the first century. Its right to the world's acceptance was henceforth based confidently on the assumption of its absolute worth.

A conviction of this kind had indeed been

implicit in Christian faith from the very beginning. It found expression in the belief of the early church that Jesus as the Messiah would presently return in glory, to usher in the consummation of God's Kingdom. When we consider its essence rather than the pictorial form in which it was embodied, this belief was a declaration of the supreme significance of Jesus. He was acknowledged to be on the throne of the universe, and all things in the end were to come before Him for judgment. It was this conviction that supplied the motive for the intense missionary activity of Paul. He felt that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The gospel made its appeal to all men because it gave the revelation which all were seeking. It realised once and for ever the central idea of all religion. Paul does not, however, attempt any reasoned proof of the absolute validity of the Christian message. He moves, we must remember, within the limits of Jewish theological thought, which afforded him no means

of even stating the conception, much less of working it out in its various implications.

It was the alliance with the Alexandrian philosophy which first enabled Christian thinkers to formulate the idea of an absolute religion. We have seen how the deeper apprehension of the mystery of our Lord's Person led to the abandonment of the primitive Messianic belief, and the substitution for it of the doctrine of the Logos. For centuries Hellenic thought had been seeking to discover the truth which lies behind appearance; and the whole philosophical movement had its outcome in the Stoic hypothesis of a Logos—an immanent reason which was the ultimate reality. By the adoption of this hypothesis, in however modified a form, a wider range was opened to Christian theology.

Two books in the New Testament bear profound traces of the Alexandrian influence, and the object of both of them is to exhibit Christianity as the final revelation. These

books are the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Fourth Gospel. But before considering them in some detail it is necessary to take account of a third writing in which their thought is partly anticipated, and which is also affected, though in a less degree, by the philosophical teaching.

The authorship of the Epistle to the Ephesians is one of the vexed questions of New Testament criticism ; and for our present purposes we do not require to investigate it. The Epistle may have been written by Paul, for its doctrine of salvation is purely Pauline, and its view of the Person of Christ and His cosmical significance gives a fuller development to ideas which are foreshadowed in the undoubted Epistles. On the other hand, the striking difference between its long and intricate periods and the abrupt energy of Romans and Galatians, would seem to prove conclusively that if inspired by Paul it cannot have come directly from his hand. In its argument, likewise, the characteristic Pauline

ideas are pushed to an extreme to which we find no parallel in the other writings of the Apostle. Whether by Paul himself or by one of his disciples, it represents the transition from Paulinism to a type of doctrine akin to that of the Fourth Gospel.

The chief purpose of the Epistle is to set forth a mystical doctrine of the church—in view, apparently, of the heretical movement which tended towards disunion. The writer goes far beyond the Pauline conception of the church as the true Israel. To his mind it is a new and world-wide community, in which all the partitions that held men separate have been broken down. As Christ by His death had reconciled men to God, so He had united them with each other in a single brotherhood, representing a wholly new type of humanity. The church, however, possesses a yet higher value. It has begun the realisation of the true plan of the universe, as it has existed from all eternity in the counsel of God. He has determined to gather into one

in Christ all things in heaven and earth, and the church is the nucleus, as it were, of the grand unity which will finally embrace the whole creation. Within His church Christ has made peace between those who were formerly divided; and now He continues in heavenly places the work which He began on earth. He subdues to Himself the warring principalities and powers. He builds up the universe, with its endless strife and confusion, into one harmonious kingdom of God.

The argument of the Epistle is vague and imaginative, and is based on presuppositions which have largely become unreal to us; but the underlying thought is sufficiently clear. The writer has felt that in Christianity the old contradictions have been done away. Christ has drawn men together into a universal church because He has brought a revelation that gathers up into itself all other truth. All men alike can respond to it. Their different lives and thoughts and aspirations meet in it as in a centre, and find their

mutual completion. And men can thus unite in the truth of Christ because it is the absolute truth, which lies at the very heart of things. To believe in Christ is to lay hold of the ultimate reality. He stands for the final purpose of God, which is fulfilling itself, not only in this world of time, but in the invisible eternal world.

As he pursues these lofty conceptions of the work of Christ, the writer loses himself at times in a region of mystical speculation. Much of his thinking can be set down to the influence of the philosophical theory that Christ, as the manifestation of the Logos, must possess a cosmical as well as an ethical significance. But everywhere in the Epistle we feel that the ethical idea is central and determinative. Christ, by His death, has revealed the love of God. The power whereby He has reconciled men to one another and given them peace in their own hearts, is nothing else than the power of the divine love which found its perfect expression in

His Cross. And this love of God which has revealed itself in Christ, is the sovereign principle of the world. It is working for peace and deliverance throughout the whole universe as it works in the church on earth. To know the love of Christ is to be filled with all the fulness of God and to dwell even now "in heavenly places." The members of the church, as they seek in their intercourse with one another to realise the spirit of Christ, are co-operating with God in the fulfilment of His great purpose, to which all things in heaven and earth will at last be subject. It is this ethical idea, blending at every turn with the speculative argument, which constitutes the inward meaning of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The writer has formed his estimate of Christianity on the ground of a moral judgment. He claims for it an absolute value because it is the revelation of love,—of that which is grandest and deepest in the divine character.

We pass now to the other two writings, in which the ideas of Ephesians are worked out more fully and definitely. These two writings present a striking contrast, alike in form and substance; but they both aim at vindicating the absolute nature of Christianity, with the aid of conceptions which are derived from the Alexandrian philosophy.

1. The Epistle to the Hebrews is more directly apologetic in its design than any other New Testament book. Addressed as it is to readers who are in danger of falling away from their faith, it endeavours to confirm them by an elaborate proof of the eternal worth and sufficiency of the revelation in Christ.

Who were the readers to whom the Apology is addressed? This preliminary question is not without importance in its bearings on the theological interpretation. The Epistle takes the form throughout of a comparison of Christianity with Judaism; and this has naturally led to the view expressed in the traditional

title, that it was written for Jewish Christians in Palestine or Alexandria, who were on the point of relapsing into their ancient beliefs. Of late years, however, the opinion has more and more gained ground that the original readers belonged to a Gentile or at any rate to a mixed community. It needs to be remembered that the Old Testament scriptures, to which the writer makes constant appeal, were a sacred book to the Church as well as to the Synagogue; and by the later Apologists, writing for purely Greek and even for Pagan audiences, they are quoted even more freely than in Hebrews. From the use of the Old Testament in our Epistle it would be rash to infer that the author himself was a Jew. Apart from the fact, immaterial in itself, that his quotations are all from the Septuagint, his handling of Jewish history and religion is marked by a certain detachment, as if he had approached the subject from the outside. His interest is wholly in the ritual and the priestly organisation, which to the native Jew were of

quite subordinate value. His knowledge even of those matters is remote and academical. The holy place of which he writes is not the Temple but the half-legendary tabernacle, as it is described in the books of Moses. With this account of Judaism we have only to compare that of Paul, who leaves the external worship entirely out of sight. He makes hardly an allusion to the Temple, although he had lived for years beneath its shadow, while Jerusalem was still in its glory. To him, as to his countrymen generally, the one essential fact of Judaism was the Law.

The Epistle, whatever may have been its origin and destination, is more than a plea for Christianity as against Judaism ; the necessity for such a plea belonged to a time now past. Judaism is taken, rather, as the highest representative of pre-Christian religion, and is so contrasted with the more perfect faith. In heathen worship also a catholic mind like the writer to the Hebrews would no doubt have recognised some broken lights of truth ; but

heathenism was at best the groping of man's natural religious instinct, while Judaism was based on an actual revelation. It stood, therefore, on an immeasurably higher plane than the other religions, and was the only one which could fairly enter into the comparison with Christianity.

The ostensible aim, then, of the Epistle is to prove that the new revelation is at every point superior to the old; but it is evident that behind this intention there lies another and more far-reaching one. We are meant to perceive, in the light of the comparison with Judaism, that Christianity is nothing less than the final, or, in the writer's ever-recurring phrase, the "eternal" religion. The Jewish worship is contemplated in its several aspects, and each of them is shown to be only a type or shadow of the reality. That reality has now been disclosed in Christ, and beyond it no possible advance is conceivable.

The idea of type and anti-type is derived from Philo, who also supplies the allegorical

method by which the Old Testament is resolved into a book of symbolism. Like Philo, the writer assumes that there is a supernal world, which is the home of the everlasting realities. The Jewish worship, as embodied in the Tabernacle and its ordinances, was moulded on the pattern of those higher things. But the copy, however faithful and expressive, was only a copy. It pointed beyond itself to the realities laid up in that heavenly sanctuary which has now become accessible through Jesus Christ.

Jesus has won us entrance into the higher world in virtue of His dignity as Son of God. The nature of His Sonship is nowhere defined, and the writer does not appear to have thought out his conception with any fulness or distinctness. In the background of his mind we can no doubt discern the Logos theory. Our Lord is described, in terms immediately borrowed from Philo, as the express image of God's Person and the brightness of His glory, through whom also He made the worlds.

Other allusions are traceable which recall, and were probably meant to recall, the Philonic doctrine. But no attempt is made to elaborate the idea and apply it consistently. Jesus is identified with the Logos in so far as He partook of the divine nature and existed in the heavenly world before His coming to earth; but otherwise His rank is conceived vaguely under the category of Sonship. On the basis of this assumption, that while manifest in the flesh He was all the time the Son of God, the writer proceeds to interpret His character, as it was revealed by the actual events of His earthly life.

The body of the Epistle consists of a demonstration of the superiority of the new religion to the old. This demonstration is carried out by means of three contrasts. (1) Christ is higher than the angels, through whom the Jewish religion was given. (2) He is higher than Moses, by whom it was established and organised. (3) He is higher than the priesthood in whose ministry it was per-

petuated. The two former divisions are introductory to this third one, in which we arrive at the real heart of the argument.

Christ, then, is viewed as a High-priest, who opens up for men a way into the heavenly sanctuary. Four marks of His priesthood are emphasised which prove its higher nature, as opposed to the symbolical priesthood of the ancient ritual. (1) In His own Person He was a priest, not by right of descent or of outward regulation, but by the immediate appointment of God. (2) The sacrifice He offered was not an external one of slaughtered sheep and oxen, which could have no inherent value. He offered *Himself*. (3) As the sacrifice was intrinsically better than those of the old Covenant, so it excelled in the manner of its accomplishment. It was offered once for all and through the eternal Spirit,—that is, with a divine power accompanying and confirming the outward act. (4) Hence in its effect the sacrifice of this High-priest was of unique value. Ritual sacrifices could only ensure a levitical purity,

but Christ's offering of Himself acted directly on the inward moral life. It did in very truth what the former sacrifices had merely seemed to do. It broke down the division between men and God and secured us an access to the higher world.

The writer conceives, therefore, of the redemptive work of Christ under two aspects. On the one hand the redemption consists in a cleansing—a sanctification. Judaism had acknowledged that man, by his consciousness of guilt, is kept separate from God, and had sought to bridge the gulf by formal ceremonies. The ritual cleansing is replaced in Christianity by a true lustration. Those who come under the power of the Cross of Christ are inwardly purified, and the sense of guilt intervenes no longer between them and God. Why the Cross should have this sanctifying virtue is nowhere made clear. The writer, we can well believe, has no theological theory in his mind, but a simple fact of religious experience. Through the Cross of Christ the believer feels

that a new spirit has taken possession of him. Explain it how he may, the Cross is the great purifying influence in his life, and he is able to serve God henceforth with a changed heart, with higher motives and thoughts and desires. This is the true sanctification, of which the ritual cleansing was but a symbol. On the other hand, this view of the work of Christ is blended with the idea of an entrance which He has procured for us into the heavenly world. By the conditions of his nature man is a creature of earth, and has no part in the eternal realities which are laid up with God. A thick veil, like that which hung across the holy place, divides this world of sense from the world of the everlasting. And as the ancient worshippers, in the person of their high-priest, entered once a year within the veil, so we through Christ have permanent access to the higher world. He is the Mediator by whom we break through our limitations and participate in the true life.

It is here that we become aware of the

contradiction which to a large extent neutralises the thought of the Epistle. Christianity is the final religion, because it opens up a way into the world of divine reality; but that world is conceived externally, as the heavenly sphere over against the earthly. The result is that the claim advanced for Christianity cannot in the end be sustained. It is certain that the Christian, like other men, lives out his present life among the earthly things. A better inheritance may be waiting for him when he is released by death, but as yet he is debarred from it. Nothing is given him but a promise and a foreshadowing, and the real possession is still in the future. The writer seeks to overcome this difficulty by his doctrine of Faith, as the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. He maintains that the believer has already virtually entered into the world of reality: the hope inspired in him by Christ is so vivid and powerful that it almost has the worth of fruition. Nevertheless it is only hope; and Christianity becomes,

like Judaism itself, a religion of anticipation. It can afford us nothing more than types and symbols,—the far-off vision, not the possession, of the desired country. We cannot but feel that by adopting the Philonic conception of the two worlds the writer fails to give true expression to his deeper thought. He is conscious that in Christ we lay hold on the higher realities, and that the Christian religion is therefore of absolute value. But he is compelled to think of those realities in a purely speculative fashion. They become the archetypal forms of Platonic theory, the ideal things, contrasted with the earthly and phenomenal. Thus he obscures the great truth which would have given consistency to his argument, that the divine realities are ethical in their nature. Christ revealed them to us by His life and death, by His love and goodness and holiness. Through faith in Him we can have our inheritance even now in the eternal world.

This is the ultimate thought in the writer's mind, and again and again it comes to clear

expression, in spite of the limits imposed on him by his artificial scheme. When we penetrate beneath the philosophy and the symbolism of the Epistle, its main conceptions resolve themselves into two. (1) Christianity is the religion of immediate, unrestricted access to God. It is by no accident that the writer touches briefly on the two first and apparently more important divisions of his theme, in order to concentrate his attention on the third,—the supreme worth of the Priesthood of Christ. He perceives that religion in its essence is nothing else than communion with God. The religion which can perfectly fulfil the priestly office of mediating the approach of man to God, must be the true and all-sufficient religion. And in Jesus Christ we have the one High-priest who is equal to His vocation. As Son of God He can make intercession with the Father; as our Brother who Himself suffered and was tempted, He has full sympathy with men and acquaintance with their need. Through Him

alone we can draw near to God, in a fellowship that is open to all, uninterrupted, based on trust and love and an inward sense of forgiveness. (2) The work of Christ, which has made possible for us this access to God, is of lasting validity. Throughout the Epistle the writer is grappling with the difficulty which has always seemed to impair the absolute claim of Christianity. How can a revelation imparted once, in a given place and time, possess an eternal value? How can we rest on a historical fact like the death of Christ as if its significance were changeless and universal? The writer of Hebrews seeks to answer this difficulty by insisting on the conception which he sums up in the great verse, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." He came out from the heavenly world, and His life among the things of time was yet lived "through the eternal spirit." What He was once He will be unchangeably. Though His work was accomplished long ago, in a single act, at

a certain date of history, it continues for ever in the eternal "now." On this side of his thought the writer is no doubt influenced by his philosophical theory; but he is giving expression, in the last resort, to a simple religious judgment on the facts of the Saviour's life. He dwells on the love of Jesus, on His faith, courage, obedience, sinlessness. He feels that there was an everlasting worth and meaning in such a life. It belonged to the world of abiding realities, and the changes of time could never wither it or obscure its infinite significance. The Epistle hovers constantly on the verge of that deeper truth for which its theological scheme allows no room—that the world of the eternal is already ours, in so far as we have entered into the spirit of Christ.

In the Fourth Gospel, as in Hebrews, the philosophical ground-work is borrowed from Alexandria. The Gospel, like the Epistle, presupposes a world of "truth," of ideal

heavenly things which have their counterpart in the earthly things. But this conception of the higher world is wholly subordinated to that of the Person who has descended from it. He Himself is the "truth." He contrasts the Temple at Jerusalem, not with the heavenly sanctuary, but with "the temple of His body."

The Evangelist thus connects his argument with a deeper and more central issue than the writer to the Hebrews. He has perceived that Christianity is ultimately bound up with Christ Himself—not with any work accomplished by Him, but with His own Person. The Epistle is dominated by the idea that the supreme worth of Christ resides in His official character. Much is made of His obedience, His sympathy with men, His self-sacrifice; but these attributes of His personal life are all viewed in relation to the Priesthood, for the exercise of which they were meant to perfect Him. The Gospel, on the other hand, lays the whole emphasis on the person-

ality. The one purpose of Christ's coming was to reveal *Himself*. By what He was, much more than by any work He achieved for us, He is the Mediator between God and man.

This cardinal idea of the Gospel had its roots, no doubt, in a religious experience. The Evangelist had entered for himself into fellowship with Christ, and was conscious that through that fellowship all else had come to him. But in order to account for his experience he has recourse to the Logos hypothesis, and applies it deliberately to the historical facts. Jesus had brought men near to God because He was Himself the eternal Word,—one in essence with God.

Identifying Jesus with the Logos, the Evangelist maintains that on two different grounds Christianity is the absolute religion. (1) As a revelation it must be regarded as final, since Christ in His own Person was nothing less than the Word made flesh. The writer to the Hebrews had discerned a fore-

shadowing of the true religion in the imperfect symbols of Judaism; and John likewise acknowledges that in all times God had been partially revealing Himself. From the beginning the light had lighted every man. The Law had come by Moses; John the Baptist, the last representative of a long line of prophets, had been "a man sent from God." In these inferior manifestations the Logos had been active, shining through the darkness in fitful gleams, which at best were only for a season; but the true Light had now appeared in Jesus Christ. He was no mere reflection of the Word, but the Word itself. The knowledge which men can attain to henceforth can only be a deeper knowledge of Christ—of the absolute truth, imparted once for all in Him. (2) In Christ, however, we obtain something more than a revelation. As the Son of God He shared in the divine life, and through Him it is communicated to His people. The Evangelist, under the influence of Greek-philosophical ideas, conceives of the

true life as different in kind from that which men inherit with their fleshly nature. It was utterly beyond their reach until Christ appeared, as the incarnate Word. He was Himself of divine essence, and by union with Him we can participate directly in the life of God.

The argument of Hebrews is thus carried to profounder issues in the Fourth Gospel, and at the same time the self-contradiction involved in it is overcome. We have seen that the writer of the Epistle, while asserting the finality of the Christian religion, is unable to prove that it offers any real fulfilment. The blessings which are ours through Christ are "good things to come"; and here on earth we can only secure them potentially, by way of confident anticipation. Thus the difference between Christianity and Judaism resolves itself into one of degree. The Christian has received better promises, offered on higher authority and supported by more

ample guarantees ; but they are still promises, not realities. In the Gospel this difficulty is no longer felt. The idea of the higher world is merged in that of the divine Person, through whom the believer can possess himself here and now of the eternal life. "I will," prays Jesus, "that those whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am": in virtue of their union with Him they have their place already in that higher sphere to which He has ascended. The thought is doubtless present, and comes to definite expression more than once, that the true life will be fully realised hereafter. But it has begun now, in the act of belief in Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath life" (iii. 36). "He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me is passed from death unto life" (v. 24).

John advances yet a further step on the teaching of Hebrews. The writer of the Epistle insists on the complete and final character of the work of Christ, who has given us access to God by a single act, valid for all

time. The work done once was all-sufficient, and stands wholly apart from the changes of this world. To John likewise the earthly life of Christ possesses an eternal significance ; but for this very reason it is only the commencement of a growing revelation. Christianity, as he knows it, contains within itself an endless power of development. It can incorporate new truth, re-adjust its message to changing circumstances, enlarge its activities from age to age. The Saviour, when He had finished His redemptive work, did not simply depart "to sit down on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. i. 3). His return to the Father was at the same time a return to His people, that He might abide with them for ever—communing with them as with His first disciples, and declaring to them those many things which in His lifetime He had left unsaid.

The Evangelist thinks of this perpetual work of Christ under a special aspect as the coming of the Spirit. It might appear as if this Spirit,

who replaces the visible presence of the Lord Himself, were regarded as a separate divine Power; but this view can scarcely be borne out by a closer examination of the various passages. The Comforter is described in terms which are applied, almost in the same breath, to the indwelling Christ. By His Spirit He maintains His intercourse with His disciples, unfolds to them the hidden meanings of His earthly life, leads them to new truth and prepares them for new duties. His work, accomplished in the past, is brought into continual relation with the changing needs of the world.

By means of this wonderful conception the Evangelist placed the argument for the absolute worth of Christianity on its true basis. In view of the unceasing movement and progress of human thought, there might appear to be no room for the idea of a final revelation. We have seen how, even within the New Testament itself, the primitive forms of our religion were gradually dissolved; and

a similar process has proved inevitable in each succeeding period of the church's history. Age after age has rested in some given type of belief, which is presently left behind in the advance towards a larger and fuller knowledge. But the Fourth Evangelist refuses to identify Christianity with any fixed doctrine. He grounds its claim to be the absolute religion precisely in this — that it is capable of an infinite development. The original message was the beginning of an endless revelation, which is mediated by the living Spirit. This does not mean that Christianity in its onward march breaks away from the historical tradition. What was given at first is only unfolded. "The Spirit," says Jesus, "will take of the things that are Mine and will show them unto you" — will take, that is, the revelation contained in His earthly life, and illuminate, ever more clearly and grandly, its inward meaning. The significance of Jesus, in His divine personality, can never be exhausted. To each new time, to each indi-

vidual believer, He has a different message, which is imparted by His Spirit.

Here, however, we are confronted with the chief difficulty in the teaching of the Fourth Gospel. The Evangelist interprets the divine worth of Jesus by the Logos doctrine which he had taken over from current speculation; and the question arises whether that doctrine had any legitimate relation to the facts of the actual history. No doubt it had many advantages over the earlier Messianic conception. It was free from mere national and historical associations; it emphasised the supreme dignity of Christ and the universal nature of His work; it presented, in an intelligible philosophical language, the idea of His divine Sonship. The adoption of the Logos hypothesis was necessary for the larger development of primitive Christian doctrine. None the less, we cannot but recognise that it was fraught with serious danger. The revelation which had been given through a personal life could not be adequately expressed

in terms of a speculative theory. There were elements in it—and these among the richest and most vital—which had either to be sacrificed altogether, or modified in such a way as to lose their religious value. The Fourth Gospel itself, with all its depth and spirituality, bears witness throughout to the insufficiency of the Logos idea. Jesus is invested with those attributes which are supposed to belong peculiarly to the divine nature—fore-knowledge, self-determination, elevation above human passions and weaknesses; and in the interests of this formal divinity the true glory of His life is thrown into the background. He ceases to be the friend of sinners, the Saviour of the lost, the manifestation of God's pity and forgiveness. He is identified with an abstract principle which is conceived, after the manner of Greek philosophy, to be the ultimate "truth."

The Logos hypothesis, however, is not the central thing in John's Gospel. It is only a form, borrowed from the thought of the time,

whereby he seeks to explain the impression which Jesus had made on him as the revelation of God Himself. John had arrived at this conviction of the divine significance of Jesus, not by way of metaphysical reflection, but by an immediate judgment of faith. He was conscious that through Him he had attained to a new certainty of God, to an inward fellowship with God. How God was present in Christ was a mystery to him as it must be to us, and he sought to elucidate it by a speculative theory which was necessarily imperfect. But the theory is only a framework, more or less external. It does not affect the essential teaching of the Gospel, which in some respects can be apprehended more clearly when it is altogether removed.

The Evangelist himself, as he contemplates the life of Jesus, breaks through the limitations of the Logos doctrine. In the Supper discourses, more especially, Jesus stands before us simply as the gracious Master, who has bound His disciples to Him by the might of

His love and sacrifice. We learn to recognise Him as divine because in His own Person He manifested the divine character ; and the metaphysical questions regarding His nature and origin fall entirely out of sight. The 1st Epistle of John expresses in direct words the thought that underlies the Gospel, when it declares that God is love and that we know Him in Christ. That is John's ultimate argument for the absolute worth of Christianity. It is the final religion, because it reveals to us, once for all, that love which is the inmost being of God.

John wrote his Gospel in the critical period when the faith of the Apostolic Age was giving place to Catholic Christianity ; and his work was of decisive import for the whole future of our religion. His doctrine of the Person of Christ became the foundation of the accepted creed. It was dissociated, in great measure, from the purely religious ideas of the Gospel, and worked out with a logical

precision which is foreign to New Testament thought. John has thus been made responsible for that dogmatic hardening of Christianity which might seem to invalidate its absolute claim. To the minds of many it has no existence apart from certain doctrinal theories, which belong to a bygone age and have ceased to appeal to our modern world.

Nothing, however, was further from John's own purpose than to frame a theological system which was henceforth to be binding on the church. He indeed accepted the idea of the Logos as the highest category which the thought of his time afforded him, and was probably unconscious of its inadequacy. But his belief in the doctrine was subordinate to his belief in the living Spirit, and was, in fact, derived from it. Writing in a later age which had outgrown the primitive Messianic conception, he ventured on a fresh interpretation of the Person and work of Christ. He left the tradition behind him and followed the guidance of the Spirit, as it pointed him

towards a new and larger truth. We have learned but little from his Gospel if we are content to rest in its doctrine as fixed and unchangeable for all time. To us also Christ reveals Himself by His Spirit, and we must seek to understand His message as it comes to us now, and to embody it in more expressive forms. The finality of our religion consists in nothing else than in its endless capacity of growth and self-renewal. It is the absolute, because it is the living religion. "The water that I shall give you will be in you, a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

LECTURE VII

THE PERMANENT VALUE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DEFENCE

WE have now examined, in its several aspects, the defence of Christianity which is set before us in the New Testament. It remains, in this closing lecture, to sum up the results of the discussion and to estimate their value for the Apologetic of our own day. How far does the New Testament reply assist us in dealing with the attacks of modern unbelief? To what extent must it be modified or set aside?

There may seem at first sight to be little in common between the task of the Apostles and that of the present-day defender of Christianity. The early church was confronted

with certain definite phases of antagonism which have long ceased to have anything but a remote historical interest. Paul's controversy with the Law has become so entirely a thing of the past, that all the researches of modern scholarship can only throw a doubtful light on some of its crucial issues. The later conflict with Gnosticism is involved, even more hopelessly, in presuppositions and modes of thought which belong to a world long dead. On the other hand, while the primitive opposition has been overcome, new difficulties have arisen, undreamed of by the Apostles, which appear to threaten the whole structure of Christian belief. There is, first, the altered conception of the world which has resulted from the wonderful developments in science during the last century. The scientific account of the vast processes of natural law is now accepted by multitudes of thoughtful men as nothing less than a new revelation, with which the Christian faith in God, freedom, and immortality cannot be reconciled.

It has become necessary to defend, not only the gospel itself, but those very foundations of all religion which the writers of our New Testament could assume as unquestionable. Hardly less serious are the difficulties which have been brought into prominence by the study of Comparative Religion. Christianity, it would appear, must abandon its claim to a unique inspiration. Its genesis in history can be in large measure traced; the elements that have gone to the moulding of it can be ascertained and separated; it stands no longer as a solitary peak, but only as one summit in a vast formation. And parallel with the movements without, a movement is in process within the church itself which in some respects has completely changed the problem of Christian defence. To Paul and his fellow-Apostles the proof from scripture was decisive. They conceived of the Christian revelation as the fulfilment of the great plan which God had half-disclosed from time to time to His prophets; and they sought to verify it in the

light of the prophetic witness. Modern criticism has placed us in a new attitude towards Old Testament scripture. It has ceased to appeal to us as an ultimate divine authority ; our views of its origin and nature and of the methods by which it must be interpreted, are all different from those of the primitive church.

Thus we might conclude that the New Testament has little guidance to offer us in the endeavour to defend our religion against its modern assailants. We are engaged in a new conflict, under altered conditions, and should be hampered rather than assisted by borrowing from the Apologetic of the first age. To a certain extent this may be readily granted. There can be little doubt that the cause of Christian defence has been weakened by too literal an adherence to methods and ideas which have come to be regarded as consecrated. We have been content merely to reiterate the arguments of Paul or John, refusing to acknowledge that they presup-

posed the conditions of a past age and are now inapplicable. We have forgotten too easily that each generation must fight the battle of faith with its own weapons, at the point which is in immediate danger. The New Testament, it cannot be too often repeated, does not furnish us with an Apologetic ready-made. It only directs us to principles which each successive time must re-interpret and apply for itself, in accordance with its own peculiar needs.

Our task, then, is to determine these guiding principles laid down in the New Testament ; but there is a preliminary difficulty which falls to be considered. The great intellectual advances of the last century have undoubtedly complicated the problem of Christian defence. They have brought us face to face with questions of the first magnitude, which lay beyond the ken of the early exponents of our religion. But in doing so have they not destroyed the value of that primitive exposition altogether ?

The Apostles admittedly started from assumptions which we now perceive to have been inadequate and mistaken. Their views of the natural world, of the history of religion, of the origin and import of scripture, belonged to a system of knowledge which we have outgrown. Must we not conclude that their whole account of the Christian revelation is therefore invalidated? By many writers of our time this is taken for granted without further question. They contend that the proof for Christianity was bound up with the general structure of ancient thought and belief, and has now disappeared along with it, under the advancing tide of knowledge.

The truth is, however, that the New Testament proof, in all its essential elements, is based on ground which has been almost undisturbed by the great changes; and these may be left practically out of account in our estimate of its value. This can be maintained, first, in regard to those discoveries of science which are often supposed to have wrecked the

primitive faith. The ancient conceptions of the natural world were indeed defective and unintelligent, and the Apostles held them, in common with their age. But it is not a little striking that in a time when religion everywhere was entangled with theories of nature, hardly anything of mere cosmical speculation found its way into Christianity. Our Lord's own teaching is wholly independent of any hypothesis concerning nature. It makes its sole appeal to the moral and religious instincts which remain the same in all times, under all conditions of knowledge. Paul, it is true, illustrates his thought repeatedly from the crude scientific notions of his age, and connects his doctrine of sin with the legend of the Creation as given in Genesis. But he rests his proof ultimately on permanent facts of spiritual experience which have nothing to do with any physical theory. It was Gnosticism which first endeavoured to bring Christianity into relation with a philosophy of nature; and the Gnostic construction was felt from the

beginning to be alien to the higher religious interests. The church discerned, with an instinct which it could hardly explain to itself, that the Christian message ought not to be confounded with a scientific doctrine. To associate it with some given account of the creation and government of the world, could only obscure its meaning and weaken its grounds of security. We cannot admit, therefore, that the progress of science has in any way affected the New Testament claim on behalf of Christianity. Our religion was based from the first on spiritual facts, wholly apart from the facts of natural law.

2. It may be shown, in like manner, that the study of comparative religion has done little to impair or modify the fundamental ideas of the New Testament. If anything, it has served to elucidate them, in much the same manner as modern geometry has established the conclusions of Euclid by clearer and less cumbrous methods. Paul, for example, strains all the resources of his logic in order to

account for the abrogation of the Law, and in the end he only partially succeeds. The difficulty which to him was well-nigh insuperable, now solves itself simply and naturally by the principle of religious development. The same illuminating principle can be brought to bear on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and confirms the central idea, which is so imperfectly set forth by the methods of Alexandrian symbolism. It may indeed be maintained that the New Testament writers had already arrived intuitively at the main results of the modern inquiry into the history of religion; these results were given them as part of their conception of the universal mission of Christianity. If the gospel made a world-wide appeal, there must have been a preparation for it in all the imperfect messages of the old religions. The light had lighted every man since the beginning; the unknown God who had now revealed Himself, had accepted the worship which was offered Him ignorantly. Such ideas belong to the essence of the New Testament teaching,

but within the limits of ancient thought there was no means of clearly apprehending them. The modern science which has made this possible has not impaired the early Apologetic, but has only simplified and confirmed it.

3. The case might seem to stand otherwise with the third great movement, that of Biblical criticism. Here, it may be argued, the ground on which the Apostles built has been directly undermined; their chosen weapon has been wrenched out of their hands. But when all is said, the dependence of the New Testament on the Old is more superficial than real. The ancient book, for which a divine authority was claimed, was in some respects the chief hindrance to early Christianity; and the Apostles, so far from resting on scripture, were continually striving to remove the difficulties which it placed in their way. They had to reconcile the facts of the life of Jesus with the prophetic conceptions of the Messiah. They had to express a new and original revelation in terms of one that had come down from

the past. The Gnostic thinkers sought to escape the difficulty by boldly discarding the Old Testament altogether; and although it retained its place in the orthodox church, its meaning was largely neutralised by allegorical modes of interpretation. Proof from scripture was assumed to be necessary; and it was obtained by setting aside the letter and emphasising the hidden intention. Such a proof, however, was not really derived from scripture, but was read into it by the Christian intelligence itself. What the Apostles rested on was nothing else than the intuition of faith, the inward witness of God's spirit; and they transferred this witness to the Old Testament, which only then became authoritative. To contend, therefore, that the foundations of Christianity have been in any degree shaken by modern Biblical criticism, is utterly to misunderstand the whole nature of the Apostolic teaching. One might argue, far more truly, that criticism has served to vindicate the Apostles. The weakness of their position,

in the eyes of contemporaries, was precisely that it was not grounded in scripture. Their Jewish adversaries perceived this weakness; they insisted, with perfect truth, that Christianity must be found wanting, so long as the Old Testament was accepted as the ultimate authority. Our modern attitude to the Old Testament has relieved us of the chief difficulty which weighed on the early Apologists. We can recognise that their case is in no degree weakened, although it cannot be adequately supported by the evidence of scripture. For that evidence, whatever it may be made to prove, is of secondary value. The one authority that we can accept as final is that of the enlightened conscience, the inward witness of the Spirit—that authority, in fact, to which the New Testament makes its appeal.

Admitting, then, that Christian thought to-day is faced by many grave problems which could not be anticipated in the early church, we are not to suppose that the primitive

Apologetic has now been rendered useless. The later intellectual movement has swept around the New Testament position, leaving it very much as it was before. Loose earth upon the surface may here and there have been washed away, but this has only served to uncover the substantial rock in which the foundations are securely laid. We can now proceed with more confidence to examine the underlying principles of the New Testament defence, as they have become evident in the course of the discussion.

It will be observed at the outset that our inquiry has led us to a different view of the character of the New Testament, from that which is commonly assumed. The various writings, as we have seen, have all an immediate reference to the circumstances of the time. They were produced in an age of conflict, and their account of the gospel is directly influenced by controversial necessities and aims. The writers do not attempt to set

forth the Christian message in its timeless significance, but are constantly changing their attitude, replacing one type of doctrine by another which appears to answer more fully to given requirements. The New Testament, in fact, bears a character directly the opposite to that ascribed to it in the conventional theology. So far from composing a single body of doctrine, normative henceforth for the church's faith, it reflects a continual process of development. Its doctrinal conceptions are all more or less tentative. They express the mind of the church at various stages of its growing apprehension of the truth of Christ.

We may say, therefore, that Christianity is to be sought not so much *in* the New Testament as *behind* it. The Apostles were simply the pioneers in the work which has employed the church ever since, of discovering, ever more clearly and largely, the meaning of the revelation once given through Christ. Their contribution is of supreme importance, since

they came at the beginning, when the impulse of our Lord's personal ministry was still fresh and powerful. But they were only feeling their way towards a fuller knowledge. The truth proved always greater than their first conception of it, and another conception became necessary, and yet another. The primitive idea of the Messiahship was superseded by the Pauline, and that again by the theory of the Logos. A profound theology of redemption evolved itself by degrees out of the simple message of the day of Pentecost. There was a constant advance in thought and doctrine, yet all the successive thinkers were only striving to understand more deeply, and to express in more adequate terms, the truth which had been implicit in the original revelation. That revelation, we need always to remember, is Christianity, which must not be confounded with any type of doctrine offered us in the New Testament. The Apostles were, at best, interpreters, and their interpretation was necessarily partial and conjectural. They

left us their message, not that we should rest in it, but that we should advance beyond it, reaching forward, age after age, to new discoveries of the truth as it is in Christ.

The New Testament, then, is the record of a continual progress, a progress which was due, in large measure, to the stress of outward opposition. This fact itself is full of meaning and encouragement at the present day, when our religion is subjected to a fiercer criticism than it has encountered since the early centuries. It was through the effort to overcome attack that the church first became conscious of its true mission, and advanced to further knowledge of the gospel entrusted to it. The hostility which threatened at the beginning to undermine the foundations caused them to be established more firmly and deeply. We can well believe, and clear signs are not wanting, that the various antagonisms of our own time are working to a like end. They will result in a quickening of the Christian intelligence,

in a larger and more satisfying interpretation of the ancient faith.

The opposition of the first century was helpful in three directions towards the religious development. (1) Attacked on every side, often by acute and skilful adversaries, the church was obliged to reason out its position, and discover the real bearing of its different beliefs. The historical facts were ordered and sifted. The principles at the root of Christian doctrine were examined more profoundly. It gradually became apparent that the ideas which in their primitive shape seemed to yield at a single breath of criticism, were identified with great spiritual realities. On these the church took its stand, ever more surely and consciously.

(2) This growing certainty of the true meaning of the gospel was accompanied by a shedding off from it of much that was temporary and extraneous. The religion proclaimed first among the Jewish people, under forms that were largely borrowed, was mingled with many elements—traditional and

apocalyptic—which had little to do with its essence. It was the fire of criticism which found out the inconsistencies. The Jewish opposition was able to demonstrate that the Christian fulfilment was at variance with the ancient conceptions. Jesus was not the national Messiah; His gospel was something new, and had no valid title to the cherished beliefs and symbols which it had taken over from the past. As a result of this hostile questioning, the church was compelled, little by little, to give back to Jewish tradition those elements which it had borrowed; and in doing so became aware that they had all the time been foreign elements. Christianity, once freed from them, stood out in its true character as a spiritual religion.

(3) In the process of conflict much was assimilated from the opponents themselves. Ideas which seemed at first sight incompatible with the gospel were found to be not only in harmony with it, but necessary to the full apprehension of its meaning. Thus already

in the time of Paul the methods and assumptions of Greek philosophy were in large measure appropriated by Christian thinkers. At a later period Gnosticism, while recognised as dangerous, was not so utterly excluded but that some of its characteristic beliefs found their way into the accepted doctrine. The successive advances of Christian theology were largely due to this assimilation of ideas and beliefs which at first seemed hostile. It is well to remember that we are only following the precedent of the New Testament itself, in adopting whatever may be given us, from sources the most unlikely, towards the enrichment of our faith. One still hears talk of unworthy surrender when the church attempts to come to an understanding with some outside movement which has hitherto been regarded as opposed to Christianity. The modification of doctrine in the light of science or historical criticism is taken as a confession that the ancient faith is untenable, and must compromise with the assailing forces

which it cannot overcome. But we mistake the nature of the Christian religion when we think of it as confronting the general intellectual movement in an attitude of jealous antagonism. From the beginning it has been a growing revelation; it seeks to absorb into itself all the results of human thought—assured that by this means it will more largely unfold its own inherent message. Even while it defends itself against declared enemies, its position can never be merely negative and exclusive. Under modes of thought which are apparently hostile, it discovers something that claims kinship with itself—something that it can welcome and assimilate.

In these directions, therefore, the progress of Christian thought during the first century was stimulated and aided by the outward opposition; and we have reason to believe that the controversies of the present day will effect the same result. The endeavour to render an answer to its enemies is compelling the church to think out its beliefs

more clearly—to separate what belongs to their substance from traditional forms which they have outgrown. Above all, we may expect that the very forces which threaten at the moment to subvert our faith will be found in the end to have enlarged and deepened it. If we must needs oppose them, we require to do so with the open mind—trying the spirits whether they be of God.

Returning now to the New Testament Apologetic, we have seen that it is mainly concerned with three types of thought which are at variance with Christianity. It might appear as if these were singled out in view of the given historical conditions; and this to a certain extent must be granted. But looking deeper we can perceive that the conflict with these particular forces was more than accidental. They manifested themselves in the first century under modes which belong to the past, but they are always reappearing; and the New Testament polemic, directed as

it is against their underlying ideas and assumptions, possesses an enduring value.

1. The first great controversy was with Judaism, primarily as a religion, then as a tendency within the Christian church itself. The success of the Judaizing opponents of Paul was not entirely due to their representing the claims of the Law, which were still held to be paramount. It arose far more from the superior attraction, to the ordinary mind, of the Jewish idea of religion. Christianity with its demand for a purely spiritual service, for an inward harmony with God's will, involved a strain and a responsibility. The Law, as a system of outward rites and mechanical rules of conduct, offered something tangible; it simplified the religious task; it relieved men from the painful effort of individual thought and faith. Thus the struggle that commenced in the days of Paul was the same in essence as that which has continued ever since. Each attempt to vindicate the spiritual nature of Christianity has been baffled by the ineradic-

able craving for some outward authority, some definite rule and standard. Judaism—the tendency to replace faith by works, the inward law by the outward—has pursued Christianity like its shadow; and in one disguise or another we have to reckon with it always. Thus Paul, while he dealt directly with a controversy of his own time, stood for a permanent issue. Over against the legalism which is continually re-asserting itself, he emphasised faith as the one essential thing. The Christian builds his life on faith, on the immediate sense of a personal relation to God; his morality is no prescribed obedience to an outward law, but the living expression of faith. In its wider sense the contention of the great Apostle can never lose its meaning; and it is no accident that each new awakening of the church to the real character of its message has begun with a return to Paul. By his struggle with the Jewish opposition in the first century he became the leader in an endless warfare.

2. The conflict with heathenism had likewise a far-reaching significance. We have seen that Paul, not content with denouncing the senseless idols, went back to the principle which underlay the idol worship, and which found embodiment in the whole constitution of ancient society. That principle he discovered in the implicit denial of any power above the material. Men refused to acknowledge God, and set the creature in place of the Creator; hence the perversion of all ideals and instincts and relations, and the utter corruption of the Pagan world. It matters little that in its immediate reference to Greco-Roman paganism this analysis was partly mistaken; the very mistake serves to give it a wider application. The Apostle is thinking not so much of ancient heathenism as of an intellectual temper which manifests itself in all times, and was never so conspicuous as it is to-day. With but little modification the argument is still valid against the modern systems of naturalism, supported as they are

with imposing theories of science. It is true as much as ever that God is the necessary postulate of any attempt to make the world intelligible. The denial of Him involves sooner or later the bankruptcy of thought, as well as the dissolution of all moral obligations. Paul's thesis in the first chapter of Romans is substantially that of Kant, that the spiritual verities, although they cannot be logically proved, are yet given as the ultimate pre-suppositions of the practical reason. They are bound up with the very constitution of man's nature, and the negation of them deprives our life of all its meaning. Paul, however, reduces the philosophical argument to a simple, practical one. He shows what society had come to in consequence of its refusal to acknowledge God. He maintains that the same experiment will lead invariably to the same result. After all our endeavours to combat the naturalistic view of the world, we must always fall back on this argument of Paul. The religious instinct needs no other vindication than the

simple fact, that when it is disowned man's life becomes impossible.

3. The controversy with Gnosticism is in some respects the most instructive chapter in New Testament Apologetic. Gnosticism was the earliest attempt at a philosophy of religion. It sought to present Christianity as a speculative system, which should commend itself to the more advanced intelligence of the age. We need to acknowledge that this effort was to a certain extent justified. Speculation on the great religious facts is legitimate and necessary, and the endeavour to suppress it has always resulted in the cramping of belief in the fetters of an ignorant orthodoxy. It is noticeable that Gnosticism itself originated in the great period of Christian development, and that the development ceased when the free play of speculation was forbidden. None the less, we have to recognise the wisdom and the necessity of the New Testament protest. Religion does not make its primary appeal to the intellect, and "knowledge"

in the Gnostic sense cannot be regarded as the substance of it. The real mysteries are nothing else than the simple eternal truths; and the organ by which they are apprehended is not the intelligence, wherein one man differs from another, but the universal instinct of faith. This is the essence of the New Testament reply to Gnosticism, which still holds good in regard to all the modern substitutions of a philosophical creed for religion. They set out from a theory of religious knowledge which is radically mistaken. In their subordination of the claims of faith to those of an arrogant intellectualism they miss the deeper wisdom which it is their professed intention to discover. This is true of all merely speculative constructions, within as well as outside of Christianity. We have seen that Gnosticism was partly due to a false exaggeration of the theological element in the teaching of Paul, and that the task devolved on the later church of getting behind theology altogether to the primal simplicity of the gospel. A

similar task is repeatedly laid upon the church. The intellectual conception of religion is always encroaching on the purely ethical and spiritual; and we need to remind ourselves, ever and again, that love is higher than knowledge, that the supreme verities are revealed, not to the wise and prudent, but to babes. In the New Testament reply to Gnosticism we have the necessary corrective to misconceptions which may arise out of the New Testament itself. We are pointed back, behind the theological interpretation, to love and obedience and simple faith.

There are several broad conclusions in which we may summarise the results of our whole study of the primitive Apologetic. (1) The New Testament, which has been too often construed as a kind of title-deeds, binding the church for ever to certain fixed doctrines, is in reality the charter of Christian liberty. It bears witness to a constant revision and enlargement of belief. As the church widened

its sphere of activity, and appealed to new times and new modes of culture, it did not hesitate to re-interpret its doctrines, even those which appeared most vital and fundamental. The difficulty of the later Apologetic has ever been the supposed necessity of vindicating a given traditional type of faith. We have been required to defend, not merely Christianity, but the ancient forms in which it has been embodied—by Paul, by the great councils, by the various symbols and confessions. It may be claimed, however, in the name of the New Testament itself, that this burden ought not to be laid on us. Christianity is something behind the creeds, and each generation must seek to understand it for itself and express it more adequately. The real betrayal does not consist in discarding the traditional forms, but in clinging to them persistently when they have ceased to convey a living and intelligible message. Paul would have betrayed the gospel if he had gone forth to the Gentile world with precisely

the same message as Peter. John would have betrayed it if he had stood fast by the Pauline doctrine, and refused the larger categories of thought which the new time afforded him. Every true defence of the Christian message implies an effort to re-state it, in language which is fresh and living.

(2) On a deeper view, however, the progress of New Testament thought was nothing else than a reversion to what was primal and essential in the gospel of Christ. Under stress of controversy the church abandoned one position and another which it had at first defended; it assimilated to its doctrine various elements given to it from without. The primitive Apostles would scarcely have understood the Christian message as it was expounded by their successors towards the close of the century. Yet it was not only the same message, but was actually more true to the original facts than that which had been proclaimed at Pentecost. The work of Christ had been adequately set forth for the first

time in the light of Pauline doctrine; the significance of His Person was more justly presented in the later conceptions than in the crude Messianic belief of the early days. Each advance was in reality a return to a purer and more authentic Christianity. The New Testament throughout is a magnificent vindication of the thought of the Fourth Evangelist, that under the leading of the Spirit we come to discern more clearly the things that are Christ's. The new commandment is that which we had from the beginning—a re-discovery of some aspect of our Lord's own message. There is no fear that by welcoming fresh light and advancing to ever larger views of truth, we may be drawn away altogether from our faith in Christ. We can only learn to know Him more fully and surely, according as we trust ourselves to the guidance of His Spirit.

(3) The New Testament writings bear witness to a continual progress of belief; yet there is one interest which remains central

amidst all the changes. From first to last the faith of the church is directed to Christ Himself. The effort to assert His claim is the one motive of the Apologetic, alike in the early preaching which simply announced Him as the Messiah, and in the mature theology of Ephesians and the Fourth Gospel. We have seen how the New Testament view of Christianity was entirely derived from this belief in Christ. The new morality, the spiritual worship, the doctrine of the church, the anticipations of a future life, were all implicit in the initial thesis that Jesus was the revelation of God. The conviction that Christianity is the absolute religion was in its essence a conviction of the absolute worth of the personality of Jesus. It may be said that the New Testament Apologetic turns in the last resort on this single issue of the claim of Jesus Christ to the world's faith and obedience. All else is peripheral, and subject to an endless modification. This alone is the inalienable truth by which our religion must stand or fall.

It does not follow, however, that the Person of Christ must be construed always according to one given formula or doctrine. The New Testament itself offers several doctrines, and our own age is not necessarily bound to any one of them. All that is required of us is to acknowledge the supreme worth of Jesus, to realise that God is seeking through Him to draw us unto Himself. It matters comparatively little in what theological terms we thus confess Jesus as Lord. Those terms are truest which will best express for each man his own individual faith.

How is the faith in Christ to become a living power in our time, as it was in the primitive church? To this question our study of the New Testament Apology will suggest at least two answers. There is need, in the first place, for a closer alliance between Christianity and the actual mind of the age. Our religion has too long identified itself with antique modes of thinking. The idea still

lingers that it can only be defended by combating the most assured results of science, by denying the right of criticism, by maintaining creeds and dogmas which have ceased to make true appeal to any man. A better way is marked out for us by the New Testament. Those first Apologists commended their message to the world of their time by expressing it in the highest categories of contemporary thought. The forms which they employed were precisely those which were most intelligible, and the older ideas were allowed to fall aside as soon as they were emptied of current meaning. What we need to-day is an honest recognition of all the new facts of knowledge, and a re-statement, in the light of them, of the permanent Christian truths.

When all is said, however, faith is something more than knowledge. The Apostles were conscious that their best arguments could go but a little way if they were to verify their message to the unbelieving world. It depended

for its ultimate proof on the inward witness of the Spirit, which was by its nature incommunicable. Yet in some measure the Spirit could be manifested to the world through those who had received it. The individual believer could show by his deeds and character that a new power was working in him. The church as a whole could stand for the higher order, and build itself up as a true Temple of the living God. It was by this moral evidence, by impressing its truth on men, not in word but in power, that the Christianity of the first age achieved its victory. If we are to conquer still in the struggle with modern unbelief, it must be with the same weapons. The gospel must assert itself through the lives of Christian men. It was first given us in a personal life, and cannot be revealed and authenticated except by other lives, moulded in the likeness of that of Christ. "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, I have sent them . . . that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

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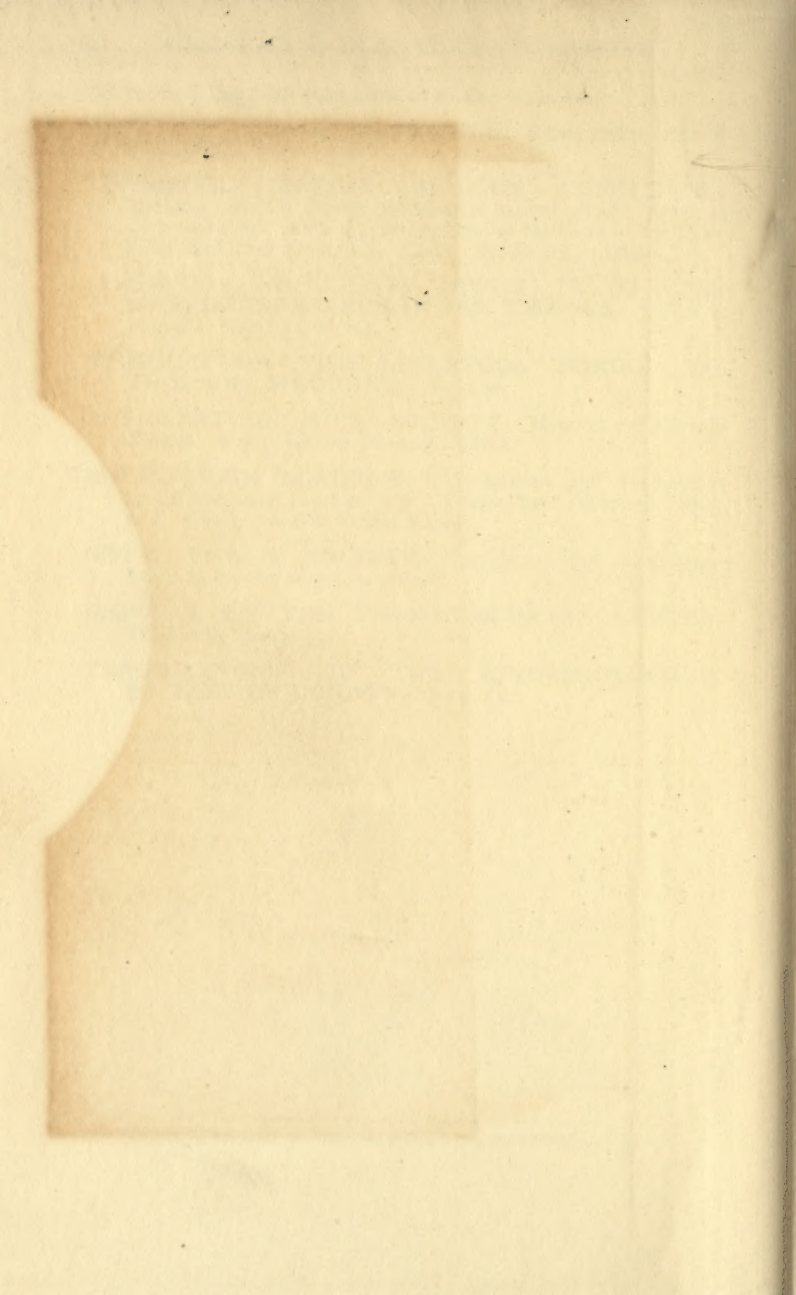
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